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1612.







THE
ATTRACTIVE MAN.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,
AUTHRESS OF THE "VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS
IN AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

PREFACE.

POSITIVELY, and without any species of equivocation, does the author of the *Attractive Man* plead **NOT GUILTY** to the charge of personality, which has more than once been brought against her.

She has never, either on the present occasion, or on any former one, set her pen to paper with the intention of sketching the character of an individual.

That she has repeatedly attempted to portray the distinctive features of a class, is quite true, and it is a truth that she sees no reason of any kind for wishing to conceal.

That she has been occasionally successful in this attempt, has been proved by the fact that very many individuals belonging to the different classes she has thus intended to describe, have either

pointed themselves out, or have been pointed out by others, as the originals from which her intended illustrations of their class have been taken. If there were no truth in her sketches this could not have happened, and it is this which must console her for the very undeserved imputation of personality which has fallen upon her.

Certain it is, indeed it is almost too obviously so to be stated without platitude, that without the observation of individual character it would be impossible to describe a class. And if it be a sin to study character, I freely avow myself to be one of the "offending souls." But so carefully when peculiar traits have recurred to me, illustrative of the tone of character, or style of manners, which it was my object at that moment to portray, have I removed every thing like personal allusion, by attendant circumstances, that though I may, and hope I have given the type of a class, I have never made a single individual portrait.

I could scarcely hope to be listened to with grave belief were I to state the number of persons who have been pointed out to me as KNOWN to

have been the originals of "the Vicar of Wrexhill." But I can most sincerely affirm that in no single instance were these suspicions just. And I think that with one single exception, I might honestly say the same of every thing I have ever written; and this single exception is not one at all likely to be detected either by the object of it or any body else.

The character of Vidal in the following tale is not imaginary as far as either faculties or qualities are concerned. I know, however, of no man living who can justly say, "The character of Vidal is intended for me." Neither do I mean that it is the portraiture of any individual now dead, whom I have known in life. But I have recorded feelings and conduct which I *have* known to exist, and which would, to the best of my knowledge and belief, have come out in the manner I have described whenever one of the same class of persons was exposed to similar circumstances.

F. T.

THE ATTRACTIVE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

"I wonder any man alive should ever rear a daughter."

NEVER did an elderly gentleman find himself more unexpectedly attacked than did the very worthy John Jonas Clementson, Esq., of Dalbury Park, in the county of Salop, on the afternoon of Wednesday the 29th of August, 184—.

The circumstances of this assault shall be presently stated without preference or partiality to any party; but in order to make the feelings which led to it intelligible, a short description must be given both of the scene of action and the persons engaged in it.

The spot on which the affair took place, was the drawing-room of Lord Randal, an extremely agreeable Irish nobleman, who happening to have a freehold estate in the above-mentioned county, of about five hundred acres, felt it not a sin to live upon it, though he was the owner of lands in Ireland to ten times the amount.

But the fact was, that Lord Randal had a peculiarly strong propensity to "*happify*" people, as the Americans call it; and for two years and eight months, after he came into possession of his property, he remained pretty nearly stationary at his place in Ireland, determined to set an example to all Irish landlords, and to do good on the largest scale in his power.

But there was too much against him, and he gave in. He did all he could, however, before he left his Irish castle, in the way of repairing cottages, lowering rents, and selecting a man of honour and honesty as an agent; but Lord Randal, when he came to his property, was not quite thirty years old, and had recently married a very pretty wife, of whom he was, perhaps, rather extravagantly fond; so he could not stay any longer in Ireland at that time; for, in the first place, it did not seem to him that he did any good at all, and, in the second, Lady Randal told him, confidentially, that she was quite sure she should not survive another winter there.

They were now, therefore, enjoying the comforts of an English home in summer, as well as in winter, and Lord Randal, while he shed the moral sunshine of his animated good-humour on all around him, endeavoured to forget that he was an absentee.

There were present in his drawing-room, on the evening in question, a dozen people besides himself and his lovely lady, his dinner-party having consisted of fourteen; a number which he never exceeded; nay, he was wont to say that even this exceeded by two the proper numerical amount of a dinner-party.

But his table was round, and his lordship's practical arithmetic had taught him, that in order to have ladies and gentlemen (always equal in number at his dinners) placed alternately, it was necessary to have a number which, when divided in half, gave an uneven quotient—that is, presuming that the master and mistress of the house chose, in good old English style, to sit opposite to each other.

So the guests were twelve in number, and in name and degree as follows. In the first place there was Sir William Monkton, together with his better half, the Lady Sarah. We will not pause here to dilate upon their individual qualities; they were people “of fashion,” and that is all that it is necessary to say

about them at present, though it may not be superfluous to observe, at once, that they had only returned from a five years' residence on the Continent a few months ago.

Then there were four individuals of the name of Springfield, viz.: Mrs. Springfield, the widow of a distinguished officer; and in proof of her respect for his memory her cards were printed thus: **THE DOWAGER MRS. GENERAL SPRINGFIELD**, there being another General Springfield still in existence, who moreover had a Mrs. General Springfield belonging to him.

This dowager Mrs. General had a son and two daughters, who were all with her at the party we are describing.

Then there were two single ladies, aunt and niece, the former being three-score years of age, the latter one.

If the reader will have the kindness to count all the ladies here enumerated, he will find they amount to six; and to complete an equal number of the nobler sex, there were, in addition to the two already mentioned, Mr. Theodore Vidal, a staying guest, just arrived, but invited to pass the shooting season at Randal Oaks; Mr. Lexington, a gentleman both by birth and education, but residing,

at the age of thirty-five, in rather small lodgings at the obscure little market town called Compton, at the distance of half a mile from Lord Randal's Lodge gates; Mr. Norman, the old bachelor proprietor of a beautiful little place called Fairy Ring, and *the* Mr. Clementson, of Dalbury Park, whose name will be found in the first page of this narrative.

These persons, together with their noble host and hostess, amounted to the stipulated number of fourteen.

The dinner was over, and the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room; when, just as the *chasse caf  * was handed to Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, the elder of the two single ladies mentioned above, and while she was in the very act of filling the little glass which accompanied it to the very brim, it occurred to her to ask Lady Randal, by whom she was sitting, when she thought Mr. Clementson intended to introduce his daughter "to company?" "because you know, my lady," she added, in a whisper, "the coming out of such an heiress as she will be, ought to make something of a stir in the neighbourhood. I suppose dinners and dances, and all that, will begin again at Dalbury Park, as soon as the young lady is brought out. Don't you think so?"

"Oh dear yes, I dare say. But how old is she, Miss Elizabeth? We were not here, you know, when her mother died, and the father shut himself up so. I have heard about it all you know, from you and your sister; but I have no idea when it happened. How old do you suppose his little girl is now?"

"Little girl, my lady! She may be little or big, to be sure, for nobody but the servants and the governesses have ever set eyes upon her in this part of the world, since her mother died, or at any rate, not since the governesses came. And when he takes her, which you know he does for a month or two every year, to his other place in Kent, I am told it is exactly the same thing. Nobody ever sees her; even when she rides and drives, it is only in the park there, just the same as it is here. So, whether she is little or big, I am sure I can't say, but that she must be rather more than seventeen, I am as sure as that I shall never see forty again."

"Is it possible? Good Heavens! a young heiress of seventeen shut up in an old manor house, and never seen by mortal eyes! What a delicious romance!" cried Lady Randal. "Only conceive," she continued, "that I should know nothing about it! Thank you a thousand times, Miss Elizabeth,

for your information. Would you not like to take a little more of the *chasse café*? I know you like it, because it is sweet;" and her ladyship, by a movement of her head, brought back the bearer of the salver.

"Tell my lord that I wish to speak to him," said Lady Randal, while Miss Elizabeth, after muttering the words, "I don't know about another glass, it must be only a drop, at any rate," once again tested the capacity of the little goblet, and once more swallowed all it could hold at one gulp.

"Beg him to come to me directly," added her ladyship.

The message was given, and Lord Randal walked across the room with the alacrity of step with which he always approached his beautiful wife.

"Did you send for me, love?" said he, touching her ivory shoulder with the tip of his finger.

"Yes, dear William," she replied, "I want you to bring the Squire of Dalbury, as you all call him, up to my footstool this moment. And when you have brought him, you must not go away, remember, unless it be to bring every body else in the room, to hear what I am going to say to him. I have business of importance to discuss with him, I promise you."

“ Indeed,” returned Lord Randal, smiling. “ Depend upon it I shall not be out of hearing, for I am exceedingly curious to know the nature of your business with our squire.”

Lady Randal only nodded in reply, as a signal that his lordship was to set off upon his mission, which he immediately did, and almost as immediately returned with the said squire, who, as he “ louted low before the dame,” looked a good deal surprised, and a little embarrassed.

Mr. Clementson was a well-looking, middle-aged gentleman, who, had he been as well preserved to the age of fifty, or a little more, in the town, instead of the country, would probably still have been called a very handsome man. As it was, however, “ well-looking old gentleman,” was the extent of the praise which his good looks elicited from his fair neighbours; but even this was useful to him; and, unconsciously to herself, perhaps, Lady Randal began her attack with more of pretty playfulness than she would have done had he been an “ ugly old man” instead.

In return to his old-fashioned but not ungraceful bow, performed in the first position, she gave him a playfully stately nod, and said,

“ John Jonas Clementson of Dalbury Park, Esq.,

I ask you not to sit because such attitude is not seemly for a suspected criminal, when under examination before competent authorities. . . . You are now, sir, to render reason for having hidden, concealed, shut up, and imprisoned within the gates of the said Dalbury Park, a young damsel who has heretofore been supposed to be your daughter, but who is now strongly suspected to be a sort of feudal prisoner, into whose lamentable condition we, her sympathising neighbours, are now determined to inquire. Are we not, Miss Elizabeth Jenkins?"

"My little girl a prisoner?" replied Mr. Clementson, laughing. "Your ladyship had better send a deputation to inquire whether she is conscious of imprisonment. Why, my dear lady, she is as free as a mountain goat, and pretty nearly as wild too, I believe. If her French and English governesses did not keep a pretty tight hand over her, and make her stick to her lessons for a few hours every day, I do really believe she would be as wild as the winds, for when she gets upon her pony, she positively gallops about the park more like a fearless Arab boy, than a young lady. She is a queer sort of a prisoner, my lady."

“About the park, Mr. Clementson! Oh! fie! fie! fie!—why does she gallop *only* about the park, sir? Is not that imprisonment? Why have we not the pleasure of her society among us?”

“Her society, dear lady! Poor dear little Mary! I doubt if your ladyship would greatly approve her as an addition to your society. If you were to make the experiment, Lady Randal, I think you would be inclined to send her back again to her schoolroom for a few years longer. Why she has no notion as yet of any greater pleasure than romping about the shrubberies with her young favourite and playfellow, Lucy Dalton.”

“Lucy Dalton!—oh what a sweetly pretty name! Then are we to understand, Mr. Clementson, that you keep two young ladies enclosed within the palings of your park?”

“Oh, no! Lucy Dalton is not a young lady,” replied the squire, laughing, “she is the daughter of my late coachman, a pretty, delicate little thing, just about the age of my own little girl, and they have always been playfellows. I took her just after her father died—it is some time ago now—to live, or almost to live, in the house, on purpose to please my little Mary, and she always goes with us to my other

place in Kent. I don't believe either of the children could live without the other."

"Little girl?—little thing?—little Mary?—either of the *children*? Mr. Clementson, I suspect you must be taken down from the bar, and our excellent friend Miss Elizabeth Jenkins placed there instead ; what could tempt you to misrepresent matters so, my dear Miss Elizabeth ?" said Lady Randal, turning round upon the person she addressed, holding up a reproving finger, and reproachfully shaking her head.

"I have not misrepresented at all, I do assure your ladyship," returned Miss Elizabeth, colouring, and looking rather angry ; "and it is not the first time, as I am sure Mr. Clementson must acknowledge, that we have done all in our power to persuade him that his daughter ought to come out ; both I, and my sister Anne, too—haven't we, sir ?"

"Indeed, ma'am, you have been very kind," replied the squire, with a queer little, quizzical sort of smile, "but you know, Miss Elizabeth, I have always declined your obliging invitations, because she was too much engaged with her lessons, and, besides, I was always afraid she would be saying, or doing something she ought not. And Mademoiselle Panache, who is her head governess, makes such a

point of her not being introduced till we have been to Paris for a year or two to finish her, that I have made up my mind to take her advice; and next year we are to go to Paris, and then, ladies, I suppose you wont call her a prisoner any longer?"

"I am not quite sure of that, Mr. Clementson," observed Lady Randal; "if she is to be led about by a pair of governesses, I doubt if I shall consider her as being in possession of much liberty. However, you have, on the whole, pleaded your cause very well, Mr. Clementson—for the very circumstance of her having two governesses and a playfellow in her suite, proves, that our good friend here must be out in her chronology. I sent Lord Randal to bring you up to me to be scolded, because Miss Elizabeth Jenkins assured me that your little girl was seventeen years old."

"Seventeen devils!" exclaimed the squire, with considerable violence; "if you can believe *that*, I don't wonder that your ladyship should call me over the coals for not having brought her to see you; what could have put it into your head to tell such a —, to invent such a poetical fable about my poor dear little Mary?"

"I should be very sorry, Mr. Clementson," replied Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, again looking rather

red and angry, "very sorry indeed to contradict you, if you, sir, had not thought proper first to contradict me; but the fact is, Mr. Clementson, that your daughter Mary is seventeen years old—a few days more or less—I can't swear to the day, but I *could* swear, if it were necessary, that she was born seventeen years ago, this very year."

"Stuff and nonsense, ma'am!" returned Mr. Clementson, growing red in his turn; "I tell you it is no such thing; I won't pretend to say that I remember the exact day, and hour, she was born, for I never could remember a date in my life. But common sense, Miss Elizabeth, might convince any one, that I must know better than you about it; and I tell you, ma'am, that I am quite positive my daughter is not more than twelve or thirteen at the very utmost. Her governesses—who are both of them admirable women, and both of them recommended by the late Duchess of Markland, who was Mary's godmother—both the governesses have told me, over and over, that I must not think of taking her to Paris for the finishing, before next year; and after she has taken finishing lessons in Paris for one year, or two, or three—according as she gets on—I shall take her to London, to pay her duty to the

queen, and I don't think your ladyship can call such a plan as that making a prisoner of her."

"No, certainly, Mr. Clementson. Education ought always to be the first object," replied Lady Randal, "and I dare say the ladies in whose care she is placed, are perfectly competent to judge of her progress, and of her disposition too; and, doubtless, they are right in thinking that letting her be taken out visiting, would interfere with her lessons; I dare say they are very right."

"I am happy to find that your ladyship thinks so," said Mr. Clementson, dropping into a chair beside his noble hostess, "for I am sure there is no one whose approbation of my plans I should be more proud of obtaining than your ladyship's; and as you have been so good as to express an interest about my little heiress, I must beg to assure your ladyship that although, as far as lessons go, I place implicit trust in Mademoiselle Panache, and Mrs. Morris, I trust to nobody but myself and herself, dear child, about her disposition, and what makes her happy. Her lessons once over, I let her have her own way in every thing, and certainly I should be a brute if I did not, as she is my only child, and motherless too. So I hope your ladyship

acquits me of keeping her a prisoner? The fact is, she likes to ride in the park best, because her great delight is to leap the ditches and hedges up in that part to the east of the deer-park, where there are a few small enclosures, you know, for luccern and turnips, and I have made it a law, both here and at Hartfield, that she never shall take any leaps except such as her pony knows by heart. Mary rides almost as well as I do, for that matter, but a woman's seat, my lady, is a very different thing from a man's, and considering that she is my only child, and will have rather better than seven thousand a year of her own, I do think I may be excused if I don't let her leap all the hedges and ditches in the country."

"Indeed I think so," replied Lady Randal, "nothing I am sure can be better or more careful and affectionate than all your schemes for her, and when you think she is old enough to pay me a visit, I hope you will bring her to the Oaks."

This was said with so much grace and sweetness, that the good gentleman was touched to the quick, and suddenly seizing her ladyship's hand he touched her glove with his lips, exclaiming with every symptom of sincerity, "I do assure you, Lady

Randal, there is nobody in the world to whom I should introduce her with so much pleasure."

These words were spoken loud enough to be heard by Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, and they did not fall like balm upon her spirit; there were indeed reasons which made the assurance they conveyed particularly disagreeable to her, and it may be as well to explain these at once, in order to render what followed intelligible.

CHAPTER II.

THE reader is already acquainted with two important facts; namely, that Mr. Clementson, the squire of Dalbury, was the possessor of seven thousand a year, and that he was a handsome man into the bargain.

Neither of these circumstances was likely to be overlooked in a small country neighbourhood like that we are describing; the first named was one not likely perhaps to be overlooked anywhere, but united to the second, produced an effect only too powerful on the feelings of a certain Miss Anne Jenkins, the younger sister of Miss Elizabeth.

These two ladies, together with their young niece, Clara Maynard, occupied a handsome-looking well-built brick mansion at the eastern extremity of the

little town of Compton. As this mansion had been in the occupation of the Jenkins family for many generations, and moreover had two good large gardens belonging to it, the one being situated behind, and approachable from the house by a handsome glass door, and the other only divided from it by the high road, from which it was protected by a lofty iron railing with highly ornamented and very massive iron gates in the centre; the residence was pretty generally considered to be exempt from the plebeian aspersion of being a house in a country town; an imputation which in some parts of England is enough to exclude the inhabitants of many a handsome dwelling from mixing upon terms of equality with the squirarchy of the neighbourhood.

But, fortunately for the Misses Jenkins, they had not only their two gardens and their long possession to plead in behalf of their aristocratic claims, but the much more important and available fact, that their mother was the daughter of an earl, and long known, traditionally throughout the county, as having been the Lady Arabella Jenkins. This was, of course, enough to put the close vicinity of the market-town "*in non cale*," and to establish her descendants as visitable members of the county society.

Rarely, perhaps, has the power of constantly referring to a long defunct title been of more importance than in this instance; for the Miss Jenkinsses and their orphan niece, Clara Maynard, had between them all but a small income to live upon, and their little establishment was upon so humble a scale, that nothing less than the important privilege of talking of "our poor dear mother, Lady Arabella," could have procured them the entrée they enjoyed at every house in the neighbourhood.

This entrée, as the neighbourhood, though small, was gaily disposed and sociable, was a great consolation among the many privations inevitable upon a small income; but for several years the two elder ladies enjoyed another, which, in fact, grew out of the former, and rendered it ten thousand times more precious than it would have been without it. This last best blessing attending their residence in the old mansion at Compton came to them in the smiling form of hope, which, in this instance, like a delicious strain of music, had been "in lengthened sweetness long drawn out."

At the time Mr. Clementson, of Dalbury Park, first became a widower, Miss Anne Jenkins was a very fine handsome-looking woman of five-and-thirty. She had been a great favourite with poor

Mrs. Clementson, from her constant readiness to come and go, to stay for dinner, or to come for tea; to walk with her in the park, or to drive with her through the preserves; in short, Miss Anne had been ever ready to perform all those functions of a good female country neighbour, which none but an independent, and, perhaps, rather elderly young lady can perform, and which lead inevitably to the greatest domestic intimacy between the parties.

Moreover, Miss Anne Jenkins was essentially a good tempered woman, and had made herself popular throughout the whole family. The squire, his lady, and their little girl, all seemed equally fond of her, and at the time of poor Mrs. Clementson's very unexpected death, Dalbury Park was as much the home of Miss Anne as the Town Head House at Compton.

More energetic natures might have mourned more violently, but no one ever mourned the loss of a friend more sincerely than did Anne Jenkins that of Mrs. Clementson.

Her first notion was that she ought to take the motherless little girl home with her; but this the heart-broken widower stoutly resisted, declaring, and very truly, that the greatest comfort that was left him was the sight of his little girl, and that he never

could, and never would, part with her as long as he lived. In fact, the little creature doated upon him, and no wonder; for she was one of those quicksilver little animals who are never contented but when in movement, and never perfectly happy but when enjoying a game at romps, in which species of enjoyment no one did or could indulge her in the same perfect style as her papa; and, therefore, her papa was incomparably dearer to her than all the rest of the world put together.

The warm-hearted squire, who was a great sportsman, was sometimes laughed at in the field for the sentimental tone of his intercourse with his dogs; but then his dogs were fonder of him than of any one else, and he could not resist this. Still less, of course, could he resist the passionate preference evinced for him by his little girl, and the idea of parting with her was scarcely less repugnant to his feelings than a proposal for cutting her head off would have been.

He actually trembled from head to foot when Miss Elizabeth seconded the invitation her sister had given, by remarking that it was quite impossible the dear little angel could be left wholly to the care and companionship of common servants, and as she did not think there was anybody left beside himself

who loved the child like Anne, the best thing he could do would be to let her come to the Town Head House altogether, at least till she was old enough to go to a fashionable seminary.

Gracious Heaven! Let her go to the Town Head House altogether! Send her to a fashionable seminary! He literally had not breath to answer the proposal, but suddenly starting from the chair he was occupying in her drawing-room when it was made, he darted out of the room, and the house, rushed into the stable, seized upon his own horse, and then set off full gallop for his home, with a sort of vague feeling, that the best thing he could do would be to lock and bolt every door in the house immediately.

“What! leave himself alone in that great wide mansion! never to hear the little trotting feet of his darling coming along the gallery that led to his room?”

He relaxed his pace, and thought over slowly and gently, all the little tender joys he should lose, if it were, indeed, necessary to tear his precious girl away from him, till at length he very suddenly turned his horse's head towards a thick hedge which flanked the road, and made him leap it, for he fancied he heard the foot-fall of another horse ap-

proaching, and then became aware of a fact, of which he was before quite ignorant, namely, that tears were chasing each other down his cheeks, in the most unmanly style possible.

The interruption, however, did him good, for it made him rouse himself from the train of very melancholy and very useless thought into which he was falling, and he set about considering what was the best course he could take to avoid the peril of losing sight of his daughter on one side, or of being told that she was not properly attended to on the other.

By the time he got home he had determined what to do, and under the circumstances perhaps he could have done nothing better. He immediately wrote to her Grace the Duchess of Markland, who had been fondly attached to his wife, and given her own name to his little girl at the font; he wrote to her stating simply and clearly his dilemma, and received in reply a warm-hearted assurance that she should always be delighted to be useful to him, to which was added the satisfactory information that he never could have applied to her on the subject of Mary's education at a more fortunate moment, for that a middle-aged Frenchwoman of the most assured respectability and excellent character, whom she had known for years, had just lost the situation which she

had held in a noble family during the whole of that time, by the marriage of her pupil.

The duchess strongly advised Mr. Clementson immediately to engage this lady, and added, that if he did not object to increasing his household by the addition of an English governess also, she could recommend one whose perfect knowledge of music, as well as her excellent character and general information, would render her an invaluable assistant to Mademoiselle Panache.

The advice thus promptly given was as promptly acted upon, and in less time than most people would believe possible, Mademoiselle Panache and Mrs. Morris were established at Dalbury Park, where they both speedily became aware that it would be their own fault if they were not extremely comfortable, the only interference with their freedom of thought and action being the caution given to them on their arrival by Mr. Clementson, that they were never on any pretence, or on any account whatever, to prevent his daughter's coming to him, when it was her wish to do so. And as he afterwards, in the presence of both the ladies, informed his daughter, who was then just seven years old, that such had been the direction he had given, and that she was never to forget that she might run away and come

to kiss him, or to play with him whenever she wished to do so, they became quite aware of the absolute necessity of obeying this command, if they intended to retain the respective situations of French and English governess to Miss Clementson.

Both the ladies deserved the praises which the duchess had bestowed upon them; they were both very respectable women, and very able instructors; but neither of them was of that sublime temperament which might have led to risking the particularly desirable situations they had obtained, in the wild hope of convincing Mr. Clementson that it was possible the education of his daughter might be materially retarded by their obeying him in this particular. So they mutually agreed not to attempt it, but to do the best they could for their wild little pupil, under the existing circumstances, and as she was a quick little thing, they did not despair of making something of her.

This important innovation in his household being achieved, Mr. Clementson felt relieved from the tormenting anxiety which the friendly interference of the Miss Jenkinses had brought upon him; but it was some months before he could feel himself quite safe and at ease in their presence; and once, when Miss Anne, chaperoned by Miss Elizabeth

(who was ten years her senior), came to the house to see the child during his absence, leaving a message with her for him, expressive of their hope that she would very soon be permitted to come and pass a few days with them, he was seized with such a fit of terror when he received it, that a threatened arrest from the home secretary of state could not have alarmed him more. Again the idea that he should have to go through the process of dressing without hearing her step approaching, and without seeing her rosy lips held up for a kiss, came over him, and he began muttering vows in the most savage manner possible, that they should never come near the child again.

In consequence of this nervous and unneighbourly resolution, he speedily returned the visit of the two ladies, for the purpose of informing them that though very grateful indeed for their obliging invitation, he was sorry to say Mary could not accept it, because both her governesses declared that there was nothing so likely to be prejudicial to the progress of her education as any interruption or irregularity in her lessons, and therefore he had made up his mind that during her childhood she should never leave home at all.

Miss Elizabeth received this information with a

very stiff bow, and the words, "Of course, sir, you know best;" Miss Anne exclaimed with a good deal of vivacity, "Oh, dear! oh, dear, Mr. Clementson, I am so sorry!—I thought I should have her almost always with me!" And as she spoke a tear was distinctly visible in each of her fine, handsome, dark eyes.

Had not her words been of so very alarming a tendency, it is probable that the tears would have had some effect, for Mr. Clementson was truly a very kind-hearted man, but the "*almost always with me,*" was fatal. He started up, and took a much more abrupt leave than he would have done had no tears been visible, for he felt terrified at the bare idea of being wrought upon to relax in his firm resolution of never letting Mary sleep under any roof but the same that sheltered him as long as life should be spared him.

The recollection of these tears, however, produced a gentler effect afterwards. He remembered how much his poor wife had liked the society of Anne Jenkins, and how kindly ready "dear good Anne" had always been to do every thing she could to please her; and then a feeling that he was behaving ungratefully, began to torment him, and more than once his heart sunk within him from the fear

that this sort of remorseful feeling might lead at last to making him break his resolution.

“And if I do,” thought he, “it is all over with me! My girl will never be my own again as long as I live!”

Happily, however, for his own peace of mind, he had not tormented himself in this way for many hours, before it occurred to him that nothing would be more easy than to show his kind and grateful feelings towards Anne Jenkins, without sacrificing all the happiness of his life in doing so.

What was there that need prevent his being kind and attentive to them both in every way, but particularly to Miss Anne, because his wife had been so fond of her? He could not invite her to his house; no, that he would never do; he never would invite any women to his house, for they would be sure to begin inviting Mary back again, and that would drive him mad. But he might go and see them constantly, and he might send them pines, and venison, and all sorts of game, and flowers from the hot-house; and in fifty ways beside, he might prove, that he never could forget the friendly terms Miss Anne had been upon with his wife.

All these kind, grateful, neighbourly resolutions did him a world of good, and so did the persever-

ingly acting upon them ; for it put him upon perfectly good terms with his own heart upon the subject of Anne Jenkins, notwithstanding the rigid pertinacity with which he adhered to his resolution that she should have nothing to do with Mary.

Little, however, did he guess—poor gentleman—the wild work all these neighbourly little attentions were making in the fair lady's heart! Single ladies of five-and-thirty are perhaps generally disposed to receive the attentions of rich marriageable gentlemen with a good deal of reciprocal kindness, but in the case of Miss Anne Jenkins this feeling speedily ripened into a very tender passion indeed. And really there was a great deal to be said in her excuse, if she did suffer her hopes to run rather faster than any thing the worthy gentleman had ever done, or said, could justify.

In the first place, the squire of Dalbury was very agreeable—for how is it possible for any man to be otherwise, who is cheerful, sweet-tempered, and handsome? and there was still another good quality, or rather a very complete absence of a bad one, which, in this instance, very greatly increased the lady's danger : Mr. Clementson was totally and altogether free from every thing approaching to conceit.

Had it not been for this, it is impossible but he must have, sooner or later, suspected the state of Miss Anne's affections, and in that case the mischief would very speedily have been put a stop to. Mr. Clementson was a Christian, and therefore it is quite impossible that he should have thought of murdering Miss Anne Jenkins, or any body else, but short of this sinful sort of outrage, it is difficult to say where his indignation would have stopped, had he been made to understand, that there existed a woman base enough to believe him capable of giving his Mary a step-mother. Had such a thought, for a single instant, crossed his mind, respecting the unfortunate Miss Anne, he would soon have made her understand what sort of chance she had of becoming Mrs. Clementson of Dalbury.

But, as it was, the sweet delusion went on, year after year, without the slightest chance of its being removed on either side. Fruit, flowers, game, and the constant use of his carriage for every dinner party in the neighbourhood, continued at the service of the ladies at the Town Head House so constantly, that the Dalbury servants would have supplied them, even had no fresh orders been given; but this, however, was far from being the case, for the prettier and the more precious little Mary grew (and she

rally was a very nice little girl), the more her father felt that it was impossible he could do too much for dear good Anne Jenkins, to atone for the not letting her have his Mary.

But besides all this, the unfortunate lady was urged to the belief that her hopes would be crowned with final success, by the incessant encouragement of her sister. Miss Anne confessed to herself, her sister, her niece, and one or two more very particular friends, that she thought Mr. Clementson *was* "partial to her," but Miss Elizabeth did not scruple to declare, that it was utterly impossible he could go on so, without intending marriage at last. ' Sometimes she would give one reason, and sometimes another, for the delay, but her confidence in the final result was never shaken, and she was apt to express rather a strong degree of indignation towards her sister, if at any time she was led to express a doubt on the subject.

It had happened a very few days only before the identical 29th of August at which this narrative commences, that the two sisters had got into a pretty sharp argument upon the subject. The arrival of a neck of venison, together with a large basket filled, like a classic representation of a cornucopia, to overflowing with peaches and grapes,

had been the immediate cause of this ungentle discussion. Their faithful and long-tried ladies' maid of all-work entered with the basket in an attitude which seemed to indicate that its weight was enormous. Nevertheless, it was with a smiling countenance that raising it, apparently with a great effort, about a foot above the table and then depositing it upon it with a sort of pavior-like puff, as if exhausted by a great effort, she said "There, Miss Anne, I doubt if any lady in the country side has had such a present as that, this morning."

Miss Anne looked rather timidly into the face of her sister, and breathed, aside as it were, a gentle sigh.

The ancient Abigail looked archly in the face first of one sister and then of the other, and said, "Shall I leave it, ladies, or take it down to set some of it out for luncheon and after dinner?"

"She had better take it down, hadn't she, Elizabeth?" said Miss Anne.

"I don't know. There may be a note, or a letter, or something in it for what you can tell," replied her sister.

But poor Miss Anne had unpacked so many baskets with the same hope that she had got rather tired of doing it, and for the last year or two had

been growing more aware than formerly, that the operation, though both fragrant and picturesque, was not without inconvenience, for in the first place it made a very great litter upon the neat maidenly work-table, and in the next, Miss Elizabeth had a bad habit of picking off, with rather a rapid finger and thumb, the finest berries from every bunch of grapes as they were displayed before her during the process, not to mention that a few of the very brightest peaches were sure to disappear by the same agency.

Now it happened that Miss Anne Jenkins had not the very slightest shadow of *gourmandise* in her composition, that is to say as far as she was herself concerned; but this apparent insensibility to the joys of the palate evidently did not arise from any ignorance as to the fact of their existence, for she was peculiarly vigilant in administering to the indulgence of it in others, and there was one, in particular, for whose rosy lips she would, "*an' if she could,*" have selected every thing that was most dainty among all created comestibles.

In fact it was because she could not bear to see the fruit that was to be set before her darling niece,

Clara Maynard, thus handled and mutilated, that she now took courage to say, "Let Hannah take it away, Elizabeth. I am quite sure there is no letter, and if there were, you know, she could bring it up."

Whereupon Hannah, without waiting for any further orders, again raised the fragrant load from the table, and carried it off in a direction that placed its contents beyond the reach of Miss Elizabeth's long fingers, with whose adhesive propensities she was well acquainted.

Perhaps there might have been something in the manner of this exit which aroused the feeling familiarly called *crossness* in the soul of Miss Elizabeth, for no sooner had the old serving-woman closed the door behind her, than the elder Miss Jenkins commenced a very sour attack upon the younger. "How I do hate to have to do with fools!" she began, "but it is my fate, I suppose, and will be so to the end of time. If it does not drive me mad, I hope it will make a saint of me: it must do one or the other, I think."

"God forbid that any faults of mine should ever drive you mad, sister," said Anne, meekly.

"What a plague you are, with your gross affection of all sorts! I do believe in my soul that you contrive to keep off his making you an offer on purpose to plague me. There must be some reason or other for his conduct, and after all, it is more likely to be your fault than his."

"Oh! don't say that, Elizabeth, when you know so well to the contrary. Who knows so well as you do how dismally I have suffered from my disappointment!"

"Suffered, indeed! I don't believe a word of it. I believe in my heart that you like to have him dangling after you. But I am sick of it, Anne, I tell you plainly that I'm sick of it, and if you don't find some way or other to make him speak out, I will. I am quite determined that I will bear all this nonsense no longer. And so he shall find, and you too."

Miss Anne would have been dreadfully terrified by such a threat as this, had she not listened to it so very, very often before; so now she only shook her head, sighed gently, and drew the frame that held her worsted work towards her.

"You look as if you suffered, don't you?"

resumed Miss Elizabeth, enraged, as it should seem, by the peaceable expression of her sister's still handsome face. "I tell you, that you are made up of affectation, Anne, and I declare to Heaven, I doubt very much if you ever really wished to marry him at all. I should not be in the least surprised if, at the bottom of your heart, you thought it so very agreeable to have a lover, that you would be afraid of changing him into a husband."

"Indeed, indeed, Elizabeth, you are mistaken," replied Miss Anne, in an accent of the very deepest sincerity.

"Prove it then, at once, by sitting down this minute, and writing him a letter to say, that your old affection for his daughter makes it quite a misery to you to know that she is growing up without your seeing her, and that with his permission you will go and call upon her," said Miss Elizabeth.

"It is very droll that you should say that to me just now, Elizabeth, because I have been thinking so very much about poor dear little Mary, lately," returned her sister, "and it is as true as gospel that

often and often I do feel miserable about not seeing her. But that is not what I mean, that I have been thinking of, either. I have been thinking, sister, that as there must be, as you say, *some* reason for Mr. Clementson's going on so, being so remarkably attentive, and yet never saying the reason why; I have been thinking, I say, that maybe he is waiting till his daughter is old enough to be introduced into company. We know how very *very* strict he is about lessons, by what he said to us long ago, and by every thing he has ever said since, about the impossibility of our ever seeing her, because the governesses would not let her be interrupted. And if he had said and done nothing but just making us understand *that*, I am sure no such thoughts would ever have entered my head, as *have* entered there. But there does seem a mystery in his going on so very kind, and attentive, and yet so very strict about our never seeing Mary—and—and so very silent, you know, about every thing else. Well! Thinking over all this, it has come into my head that perhaps—I don't say it is so, you know, I only say perhaps—perhaps then, Elizabeth, if the education was all over, and

Mary brought out, he might *then* tell us why he has been so very, very civil to me. What do you think, Elizabeth? Do you see any sense in it?"

Miss Elizabeth Jenkins knit her brows, fixed her eyes upon the floor and remained silent.

"Ah, sister!" said Miss Anne, shaking her head with a melancholy smile, and resuming her needlework, "I see plainly enough, that you now think me a greater fool than ever!"

"Fools make good hits, Miss Anne, sometimes," replied Miss Jenkins. "And I should not be at all surprised if you have made a good one now. There *must* be some reason, and a strong one too, let me tell you, to account for such extraordinary eccentricity, and at the same time such monstrous inconsistency as this man has displayed, and I protest your guess is quite as likely to be right, as not. But how long, in Heaven's name, does he mean to go on with all this fuss of education? Surely his girl must be very nearly as old as Clara?"

"No, sister—Mary is not so old as Clara, by two years," replied Miss Anne, with the air of certainty

which a perfect knowledge of what she was talking about sufficed to give, even while differing from her elder sister. "Clara," she continued, "was nineteen last June, and Mary was not seventeen till a month or two after."

"Well! What difference does that make, goose? Seventeen is old enough to prevent a girl's being locked up any longer in the school-room. It is Clara's turn to go out to dinner with me on the 29th you know. That's all right. I would rather not have you with me, Miss Anne, for you might not like hearing me attack the squire in the style I intend to do. But if I don't make him give some account of his education plans, I am much mistaken, I'll see if we cannot, amongst us, make him ashamed of himself for keeping that poor dear girl shut up like a prisoner. If it should prove that you are right in your guess, Miss Anne, I should not be surprised if I were to bring you safe into port at last."

"Oh! sister, how can you talk so!" exclaimed Miss Anne, blushing to the very temples. "But I hope you will not say any thing very severe to him."

If he thinks he is doing his duty, Elizabeth, nobody has a right to be angry with him."

"Duty? humbug!" returned the elder; and their niece Clara, entering the room at that moment, the conversation ceased.

CHAPTER III.

THE position of the respective parties has been now sufficiently explained for the reader to understand why Miss Elizabeth Jenkins was so very little pleased at hearing the squire say that there was no one to whom he should introduce his daughter with so much pleasure as Lady Randal. Had the good gentleman meant literally what he said, he might perhaps have been justly accused of ingratitude to his older friends, and as it was thus that the already irritated Miss Elizabeth interpreted his words, she became not only very angry, but very steadfastly determined to punish him.

“I beg your pardon, Lady Randal, for breaking into your *tête à tête* with Mr. Clementson, but as I happen to pique myself upon being very exact and

particular in stating dates and facts, I must beg to set the company right respecting the age of his daughter. I have said she is above seventeen, and he will scarcely allow that she is thirteen. Now, you must allow, Lady Randal, that there is a great blunder somewhere, and if the blunder be mine, I am ten times more unpardonable than any one else would be, because my dear mother, Lady Arabella, was always so very particular about making us speak the truth. But I persist in saying, Mr. Clementson, that your daughter is not an hour less than seventeen years old; but, on the contrary, rather more."

This was more than the politeness of the squire could enable him to endure with composure. He started up, and with great vehemence exclaimed, "It is not true, Miss Elizabeth. I am very sorry to use such strong language in her ladyship's drawing-room, but it is impossible to listen to such a statement without contradicting it, and therefore, ma'am, I do contradict it accordingly."

"And I, sir, continue to assert it," returned Miss Elizabeth, in accents not at all more gentle than his own.

The latter part of this discussion had been carried on in terms so very unlike any usually heard in a lady's drawing-room, that the attention of the whole company, though rather widely scattered through the large and well-lighted room, was called to it, and by degrees every person present approached the spot where it was carried on.

Lord Randal, having executed his lady's commands, had returned to the place he had before occupied, and renewed his conversation with Mr. Norman, upon the never-ending subject of Irish grievances, and the impossibility that individual efforts could counteract the evils produced by defective legislation.

"What is all this about?" said Lord Randal, rising. "Lady Randal looks half frightened. I think I must interfere to keep the peace," and, followed by Mr. Norman, he drew near to the scene of action.

At a table near where they had been sitting, were grouped a young party, consisting of Mr. Chatterton Springfield, his sisters, Clara Maynard, and Mr. Lexington. Books, in abundance, were scattered about the table, and had produced a good

deal of light literary talk, the Springfield family being both great readers, and great talkers. On hearing the raised voices, the names of Carlisle and Dickens, Eugène Sue and the Abbate Nicolini ceased to be heard among them, and when Lord Randal and his companion were observed to rise and approach the disputants, the literary party rose too, and followed them.

The newly-arrived guest, Mr. Vidal, occupied a sofa with Lady Sarah Monkton, with whom he was carrying on a whispering conversation, apparently with the deepest interest, though if her ladyship's eyes had not, for the most part, been fixed upon her fan as she listened to him, she might have perceived that, despite the deep interest expressed by the tones of his beautifully modulated whisper, his eyes were not always fixed upon her own fair, though somewhat faded face, but wandered away to that of Clara Maynard: a species of infidelity which probably Lady Sarah alone, of all the world, would have thought unpardonable.

When the angry sounds first reached her ladyship's ears she started, and raising her glass to her eye, contemplated the belligerent parties for a mo-

ment, and exclaimed, "*Dio!*" but then appeared to forget them, and seemed disposed to renew her conversation with Mr. Vidal. And he, perhaps, might have been disposed to do so likewise, had not Clara at that moment passed before him, in order to approach the group now closing round Lady Randal.

"Will not your ladyship send me as a scout to ascertain what is going on round Lady Randal?" said he, rising.

"Nay, Mr. Vidal," replied Lady Sarah, rising also as she spoke, and passing her arm under his, "you must take me with you. I really cannot consent to exist for another moment in this unblissful ignorance." And they, too, joined the curious circle.

Sir William Monkton was suffering so dreadfully from want of a cigar, that he had thrown himself at full length upon a distant sofa, and was endeavouring to forget his sufferings in sleep. And Mrs. General Springfield had taken possession of an arm-chair, a foot-stool, a lamp, and a newly-arrived quarterly review, in which she was reading an article, "spectacle on nose," with as much unbroken

attention as if she had been sitting in her own little book-room at home.

The two last named personages remained perfectly unmoved by the tumult, but the rest pressed eagerly round the angry squire, and still more angry damsel, a good deal puzzled to guess what would happen next, for as the parties had mutually contradicted each other already as distinctly as words could do it, there really was some difficulty in anticipating what would be likely to follow.

Miss Elizabeth speedily brought the discussion to a close, however, and that in a very masterly manner. "It is no good, Mr. Clementson," said she, "to go on thus disturbing the peace of Lady Randal's drawing-room by wrangling about a fact which may so easily be proved one way or the other. Let us ask his lordship to send to the clergyman. It will not be five minutes' walk for one of the men; and, to excuse our disturbing the good gentleman, let us have a little bet upon the subject. Every impertinence, you know, is excusable for the decision of a bet. I should not think it honourable, Mr. Clementson, to propose a large one, be-

cause I am so very certain I should win. But, if you please, sir, I will bet you half-a-crown?"

"Half a fiddle-stick, Miss Elizabeth!" exclaimed the confident squire; "no, no, if we trouble good Mr. Thompson about it, we really must have a bet that deserves the name; I should like to make it five hundred pounds. However, I know that well-conducted ladies, like you, Miss Elizabeth, don't like to bet high, and therefore I will say ten pounds; will you bet me ten pounds that Mary is seventeen?"

As Miss Elizabeth Jenkins was, notwithstanding her propensity to appropriate grapes and peaches, a lady of very honourable feelings, she hesitated, and the hesitation really did her honour; for ten pounds to her, was a very different thing to what it was to her adversary; but upon seeing her hesitation, he clapped his hands, and exclaimed, "Ah! ah! Miss Elizabeth! Now it comes to the point, you begin to have your doubts, do you? Wont you venture more than half-a-crown?"

"If I have doubts, Mr. Clementson," she replied, with a good deal of dignity, "they are not of the nature you suppose."

Then, turning to Lord Randal, she said, loud

enough to be heard by the whole group: "How much do you think a person may bet, without being dishonourable, my lord, when they are quite sure of winning?"

"Do not have any scruples on that point, my dear lady," replied Lord Randal, laughing heartily, "let us put your question to the vote."

But the answer to it was spontaneously given by a general burst of laughter, followed by an assurance from all the gentlemen present, that she might most assuredly accept any bet Mr. Clementson chose to offer her, without the slightest scruple, however positive she might feel that she was right, and her adversary wrong in the matter.

"Well then, Mr. Clementson," she replied, "I will bet you ten pounds that your daughter Mary is seventeen years old ; I do not bet about the exact day, you know, I only bet that she is not less than seventeen."

"Do you agree to my making the application, Mr. Clementson?" said Lord Randal, highly amused, and approaching a table on which were implements for writing.

"Agree to it?—yes, by Jove, I agree to it, my

lord ; and if any of you are disposed to back the lady, I will be happy to increase my betting to any amount."

Lord Randal immediately indited a polite little epistle to the clergyman, and so eager were the company for the result, that half-a-dozen ladies and gentlemen put themselves in movement to assist him. Three male hands were raised simultaneously to ring the bell, one lady sought his lordship's seal, another presented him with a stick of sealing-wax, and a third materially hastened the process by finding the portefeuille and its blotting-paper; the note, in short, was sent off with as little delay as possible, but the interval before the arrival of the reply passed rather heavily. Mr. Clementson tried in vain to induce some of the party to pay Miss Elizabeth the compliment of betting on her side of the question; not one of them, as it happened, was competent to form any individual opinion on the subject, but all seemed to think that the chances were in favour of the father's knowing best.

At length the impatiently waited-for document arrived, and Lord Randal, rapidly breaking the seal,

read aloud, without a moment's delay, the following words:—

“ Mary, the daughter of John Jonas Clementson, of Dalbury Park, Esq., and of Isabella, his wife, baptised at the Park house, March 5, 1825, and christened in the parish church of Dalbury, on the 2nd of May following.”

The reading of this was followed by a silence of about half a minute, which sufficed to enable more than one of the party to perform the calculation necessary to the decision of the question.

The first words spoken after these muttered calculations ceased, were from Lord Randal, who, approaching Miss Jenkins, made her a low bow, and said, “ I wish you joy, Miss Elizabeth. What foolish fellows we all were not to back you.”

“ Joy?—You wish her joy?—Joy, of what?” cried Mr. Clementson, who had been much too firmly persuaded that she had been talking nonsense, as he had whispered to Clara, as wild as the winds, to have taken the trouble when the date of the baptism was read, to make any calculation at all. “ You wish her joy, I suppose, of hearing the truth so philosophically.”

"Why I might wish her joy of that, too, Clementson, for she really does take it very philosophically," replied Lord Randal; "but I meant that I wished her joy of having won her bet."

"You ought to be sure she has won it, my lord, before you offer your congratulations, and I cannot say that the fact has been proved to my satisfaction as yet."

"To your satisfaction, Mr. Clementson?" said Lady Randal, laughing, "no! we can hardly expect that. But has it not been proved to your conviction?"

"Decidedly not, my lady; decidedly not," replied the pertinacious squire. "Let us calculate a little, if you please. This is the year 1842, is it not? Or does Miss Elizabeth Jenkins insist upon our calling it 1847?"

"No, Mr. Clementson," replied his adversary, with all the bland gentleness of assured success. "No, 1842 will suit me perfectly well."

"Well then, how will you make out that from 1825 to 1842 is seventeen years? It is nothing like it, I tell you."

A general laugh was the answer; and then Lord Randal, laying his hand upon the arm of his angry neighbour, led him to the writing-table, and making him sit down, placed before him a sheet of paper on which he wrote in fine bold characters the date of the christening, as transcribed from the church register, and then the alarming number 17 under it. "Now then, my dear Mr. Clementson, let us set to work. How much do 7 and 5 make?"

"How the devil should I know?" replied the squire, with a considerable augmentation of colour. For the first glance at the written figures had sufficed, and he stood convicted not only of being the father of a young woman, instead of a little girl, not only of having lost ten sovereigns to the provoking Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, but also of having made an extremely great fool of himself, and of having behaved with very intolerable rudeness to an old friend, into the bargain.

Upon his thus proclaiming his uncertainty as to the amount of 7 and 5 when joined together, another universal laugh resounded through the room. There was but one possible way of his meeting it without making his condition still worse than it

was already, and this the good squire fortunately hit upon. He laughed himself considerably louder than any other individual in the company—and then exclaimed, “Beat!—Beat!—upon my soul. And I can tell you all upon my sacred honour, that I never was so astonished in my life. Randal, lend me ten sovereigns, will you?—I have just got enough to pay my turnpike as I go home, and not a penny more.” Lord and Lady Randal, between them, supplied the required sum, which Mr. Clementson gallantly presented to Miss Elizabeth upon his knees.

“You have shown me off to the company as an obstinate, wrong-headed old fool, Miss Elizabeth, but upon my soul I forgive you—I forgive you heartily, for I have a very particular pleasure in the discovery you have forced upon me. And I will tell you all, what it is,” he continued, rising, “though I don’t suppose you will any of you understand it. The fact is, that I have often tormented myself with thinking that as soon as my girl ceased to be a child, I should cease to be all in all to her. I have already proved myself to be a fool to the entire satisfaction of the company, and

a little more proof of the same notable fact can therefore be of no great importance, so I will frankly confess before you all, that I am exceedingly pleased to find that although Mary is proved beyond further contradiction to be what is commonly called *grown up*, she is nevertheless as happy with me as ever she was in her life. We have passed the hour of trial without knowing it."

"That is all very well, my good sir, and I do not at all wonder at your placing a great value upon those qualities in your daughter which enable her to be contented and happy at home," said Lady Randal, "but you certainly do not mean to tell us that you intend to persevere in your system of shutting her up within the Park palings? You don't mean to tell us, do you, that we are never any of us to be permitted to look at her?"

"Oh, monstrous!" exclaimed Lady Sarah, before poor Mr. Clementson had found words to reply to Lady Randal. "Why, my good sir, your system is a thousand times worse than letting a girl take the veil, which is so violently abused, you know, by the English. No, no, I am sure you do not think of any thing so horribly tyrannical. I shall

call upon her immediately—and give a *fête champêtre*, or something of that sort, on purpose to introduce her to the neighbourhood.”

Mr. Clementson, who had been about to reply to Lady Randal, now turned suddenly round to answer Lady Sarah, but as he did so, he encountered the little active figure of Mrs. General Springfield, whose attention having been at length attracted to what was going on, she had left her arm-chair, and her review, to join in it.

“Your daughter is really coming out at last! Is she?” said Mrs. Springfield, laying one hand upon his arm, and, near as she was to him, using the other in order to employ her glass, that she might see him better. “Nay, but I am enchanted! Shall I confess to you? Shall I avow that when talking with my young people upon the remarkable manner in which your young lady was kept out of sight, I have observed confidentially to them, that you could never have said to her, ‘I’d rather father thee, than master thee.’ However, I doubt not all this will be mended now, and that we shall see your unsunned treasure

amongst us anon. For it does 'something savour of tyranny,' there is no denying it."

Considerably before the really pitiable gentleman could reply to this, the eldest Miss Springfield ejaculated the words "cabined, cribbed, confined!" in a clear, distinct sort of stage whisper, which though not positively addressed to him, was too germane to the matter not to be felt as another hit.

"Fie, Eleanor, fie! 'you would pluck out his mystery!'" said Mr. Chatterton Springfield, in the same skilfully pervading whisper.

But now Mr. Clementson, notwithstanding the large stock of philosophy with which he had resolutely armed himself from the moment he had made up his mind to believe that Miss Jenkins was right, and himself wrong, began to show very visible signs of impatience, and his good-natured host, thinking that he had been sufficiently baited, stepped in to his relief.

"Come, come," said his lordship, "our good friend Miss Jenkins, has proved to the conviction of all present that it is possible a father may be too happy in contemplating the improvement of his

child, to have any time to spare to calculate how old she may be. That the neighbourhood have been the sufferers in this instance, cannot be doubted, inasmuch as while he has been beyond calculation happy in the enjoyment of his young daughter's society, we have some of us been reckoning upon pleasures to be derived from young beauty and Dalbury Park, without our host. But as our doughty squire has acknowledged himself beaten, I think we ought to be satisfied; and as we all know, Mr. Springfield, that you and yours trust not to your native eloquence alone, but speak with the tongues of all the poets that are and have been, I vote that on the present occasion you should quote no more, but that a general peace should succeed to the fierce battle we have fought to obtain entrance into the citadel of Dalbury."

"I second you, my lord," said Miss Jenkins, who was now in the very highest good-humour, and was already anticipating the fruition of all her long-cherished wishes respecting the establishment of her sister.

"And I," said Lady Randal, "vote on my part that a day may be immediately assigned and set

apart for the introduction of this long-hidden treasure to the neighbourhood, and that the said solemnity may be had and holden here. What say you, Mr. Clementson? Will you now consent to let your daughter lead the ball, if I give one in honour to her having attained the dancing age of seventeen years?"

"By all the gods, Lady Randal, NO," replied the squire, stoutly, but with an air of perfectly recovered good-humour. "That it is time my little girl should peep out of her nursery and school-room," he continued, "I am quite ready to admit, and if she finds as much pleasure from the change as young ladies usually do, why she will have to thank Miss Elizabeth Jenkins. She shall go out as often as her kind neighbours choose to invite her, upon condition, however," added the good gentleman, with a slight trembling of the under lip; "upon condition that nobody asks her to stay all night anywhere. I don't like that sort of visiting. It breaks too much into one's domestic comfort. Mary always makes my tea in the morning. But to return to my blunt refusal of your ladyship's flattering invitation. It must be at her own house, if

you please, my lady, that my girl is first introduced to her neighbours. I will give a ball myself, or rather Mary shall give a ball, if you will all promise to come to it."

"Oh! depend upon it we will all come to it!" responded many voices.

"And the time, Mr. Clementson, the time?" said Lady Randal, "depend upon it we shall all be furiously impatient."

"There will be a full moon this day three weeks," replied the squire, consulting his little pocket almanac. "Let that be the day. Ladies and gentlemen," he added, bowing gracefully enough to the whole company, "may I hope for the honour of seeing you all, to meet as large a party of the neighbourhood as I can collect, on the evening of the 19th of September? At any rate, I will promise you plenty of partridge pies for supper."

This invitation was received with a general clapping of hands, amidst which Miss Edith Springfield ventured to whisper to her brother,

"'Let us listen to the moon.'"

"At any rate," he replied in the same strain,

“ we cannot say with Cleopatra, that ‘ there is nothing left remarkable under the *visiting* moon.’ ”

But notwithstanding this their irresistible propensity to be poetical, which the gods had made them most pre-eminently, the Springfield family joined heart and hand in the general applause which this most unexpected invitation drew forth, and the party separated with the satisfactory sensation in the bosom of every individual who had composed it, that they were furnished for the morrow with something to talk about.

As to the peculiar feelings of Miss Elizabeth Jenkins as she mounted to her bedroom with her ten sovereigns in her pocket, the remembrance of all she had achieved in her head, and the anticipation of all that might follow, in her heart, as to her feelings, they must be left to the imagination of the reader.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING set down Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, and her niece Clara, at their own door, the "Dalbury carriage" pursued its homeward way in its usual smooth, unvaried style, appearing to go much slower than it really did, from the equable pace of the well-broken horses, the easy action of the springs, and the smooth driving of the steady coachman. All this was so exactly like all the unnumbered drives home which had preceded it, that had it not been for what was passing in the heart of the squire, he would never have been able to distinguish it in his memory from a thousand other drives. But as it was, he never forgot it.

Poor gentleman! Nothing really terrible had happened to him, yet he felt as if he had reached

the most awful moment of his existence. How very dear, at that moment, did all that had gone before appear to him! It was very foolish in him, certainly, but he could not help it, and he literally *wept*, as he thought that from a little girl, belonging to nobody, and known to nobody but himself, his Mary was now become, in some sort, the property of the whole county, and might perhaps never care about coming to sit with him while he was shaving any more. In short, he went to bed terribly out of spirits, and with a vague feeling of dread upon his mind, that Mary would clap her hands, and look delighted, when he should tell her what had happened, and that he was going to give a ball to all the people for twenty miles round.

And then, to make things worse, a frightful idea came into his mind just before he went to sleep, that somebody or other would dance with Mary, and that she would be sure to fall in love with him, and want to marry him, and go away to his home at the very end of the world, perhaps. He groaned aloud, as this hateful thought suggested itself, and plunging from one side of the bed to the other in a fit of feverish restlessness, he luckily tumbled into

so very comfortable an attitude, that he almost immediately fell asleep, and dreamed that Mary actually was married, but most fortunately to a man who had no particular house of his own, and who, therefore, never wanted to take her away at all; and then, "*with the inconsistency so remarkable in dreams,*" he fancied that the whole house was immediately filled with a multitude of boys and girls, all as like Mary as it was possible to be, and all so fond of him, that, though he had never seen the venerable figure in the Vatican, so picturesquely overrun with little children, his sleeping fancy suggested something very like it, as a portrait of his future self.

If any one had looked in upon him at that moment, they would have seen the most perfect model of sleeping felicity that ever was beheld! He positively chuckled as he lay; and when his favourite hound, who always slept, summer and winter, upon his hearth-rug, waked him in the morning with a cheerful bark, he thought, for the instant which preceded his full return to wide-awake prose, that it was the voices of a few grand-children coming to call him to breakfast.

Never was there a dream of happier augury, or more salutary effect. Mr. Clementson left his bed in the gayest spirits possible; and when, as usual, he met his daughter waiting for him in his dressing-room, he not only greeted her according to custom, with a smile, but laughed aloud in the jollity of his heart as he said to her: "I bring you fine news, Miss Mary, I promise you."

His daughter Mary, to whom news of all kinds was a great rarity, and who would have been likely enough, if questioned concerning the events that had taken place in the family, to have answered, like Agnes, "*Le petit chat est mort*," looked up at him as he said this with the most lively interest, exclaiming: "Oh! I am so glad! Tell me all about it, this very minute!"

And he did tell her all about it, and so great was her glee, and so various the comical tricks she performed to demonstrate it, that (thanks to his happy dream) he sat looking at her as she skipped about him, with the greatest possible delight, no dark anticipation of his ever losing sight of her arising to check the pleasure with which he watched her gambols.

It would be in vain were I to attempt to describe the scene which now followed, between the father and daughter. Mary's animal spirits were of the most exuberant kind. Youth, health, a lively fancy, and a gay spirit, all in the greatest vigour and perfection, and all untamed and unchecked by any feeling in the slightest degree approaching to fear, united to make them so.

It would have been impossible for any language in the world, though possessed in the greatest perfection—and Mary's vocabulary was by no means a poor one—but it would have been quite impossible for any language, or all languages mixed together, to have sufficed her to express all the variety of happy feelings which now beset her. She talked, it is true, all the time this scene lasted, as fast as it was well possible to speak, but she had recourse to pantomime unceasing, to assist her. One moment she was making, grotesquely, solemn courtesies of reception for all the company that were to come—then she was playing the violin, with her father's riding-whip upon his boot-jack, and performing the choicest steps her dancing-master had taught her—then she flew to the glass, and first shaking all her

redundant tresses over her bright face, she began to arrange them in braids and bows, as much like the wig of Mademoiselle Panache as possible; these, and a multitude of similar monkey tricks, all performed at full speed, talking as fast as she could gabble the whole time, at length put her completely out of breath; and then, after having sat panting upon a hat-box, for two minutes and a half, she jumped up again, exclaiming, "Now then, papa, I must go and tell the old ladies all about it!"

Neither Mrs. Morris nor Mademoiselle Panache, however, quite deserved the epithet of "old ladies;" Mrs. Morris, the elder of the two, having but just completed her forty-third year, and Mademoiselle Panache being two years younger. But the housemaids and the groom always called them "the old ladies," and Mary, therefore, did so likewise. But it was done without the slightest intention of being disrespectful.

She was, in fact, very fond of both her governesses, for they both treated her with unceasing indulgence, and moreover the French lady was always ready to waltz with her, and the English lady to play to her. Then the Frenchwoman was passionately fond of

acting, and many a gay hour was passed between her pupil and herself, in repeating together the scenes of all the most lively French comedies, in which there was nothing "*trop fort*" for "*la petite*."

Mrs. Morris had various agreeable talents also. She was an admirable and fearless horsewoman, and Mary, under her auspices, had enjoyed her favourite exercise in much greater perfection than she could have done without her. Moreover, Mrs. Morris was not only an excellent musician but a charming singer, and as Mary's voice was as sweet and as clear as that of a lark, they beguiled many a long summer's day, and winter's evening, in singing duets together.

In short, these ladies exerted themselves quite as much to amuse the young heiress as to instruct her, and decidedly the best part of her accomplishments were acquired in this manner.

Her two governesses were also really very fond of her, and in truth she was such a sweet-tempered little creature, that it would not have been very easy to help it. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that their joy did not quite equal hers, when they learnt the news brought home by Mr. Clementson.

Not, indeed, but that a little more variety in their lives would have been very agreeable to both of them, but the prospect of it came clouded with the probability that the very comfortable quarters, and liberal salaries, which they had enjoyed for the last ten years, might probably melt away and vanish in the broad sunshine of fashion and gaiety, which now at length seemed ready to burst in upon them. They looked into each other's faces and exchanged a sigh.

"Are you not enchanted?" demanded Mary, looking first at one and then at the other.

"Certainly, dearest!" replied Mrs. Morris. "It is enough to enchant any body to see you look so happy."

"Mais oui, mignonne; le moyen de n'être pas enchanté quand vous êtes contente?" said Mademoiselle Panache. "Mais, hélas!" she added, "n'est-ce pas que nous allons vous quitter?"

Mary's answer to this was a violent burst of tears, short, however, as it was violent, for she was both laughing and scolding the minute after—laughing at the idea of setting up for herself in the world, as she called it, and scolding them both for supposing she could be so very happy if she thought two of her best friends were going to leave her.

"No, indeed," she added, "I shall tell papa that I intend to have you both living with me till the very day I am married, and then I suppose we must part for a little while, because people would laugh at me so, if I insisted upon keeping my governesses after I was married; married women, you know, never do have governesses. But then I shall have you both back again the very moment I have got a little girl to teach. You are both of you such dear, kind, good souls, and both of you so very clever! Besides, you know, my dear darlings, that it is not at all likely I should be married quite directly. Indeed, I mean to tell papa that I wont; I have thought a great deal about that already, I assure you, though I dare say that you neither of you gave me credit for having so much gravity and wisdom in my thoughts. But I have long had it in my head that this dear, delightful time of being grown up must come, some time or other, though I can't say I expected it would be so beautifully sudden. Oh! bless you! you dear little birds!" she added, after the pause of a moment, and running to a balcony that had been fabricated for her particular satisfaction.

"Don't they seem to be singing on purpose to wish

me joy? And the flowers, too! Nobody will ever persuade me, Mrs. Morris, that there is not some sort of mysterious sensibility in flowers. I have observed a thousand times over, I have indeed, that they do smile, and look bright and glad upon one at particularly happy moments; and quite in the early morning, for instance, when one goes out unexpectedly to talk to them a little. And, then, don't they breathe upon you? don't they? Deny it if you can! I know they have some sort of soul in them, and I never will marry any man who won't let me convince him of it."

At the end of this long harangue, which had been uttered with wonderful rapidity, the young lady became suddenly silent, and stood for a minute or two with her eyes steadfastly fixed on the ground, while an expression of deep thoughtfulness took possession of her pretty face.

"Upon my word, it will never do, Mrs. Morris. It won't indeed. It will never do for me to come out like a grown-up young lady in this very sudden manner that papa talks about. I don't mean to say that papa does not always let me have plenty of dresses; indeed, if I had not Lucy to give them to,

I should not know what to do with them. But that makes no difference. I am quite sure that nothing I have got, dresses, or bonnets, or pocket handkerchiefs, or any thing, will do for me now that I am grown up. Don't you think so, both of you? Don't you think that I had better go to papa directly, if he is in the house, and put him in mind of this? Of course you know he will do every thing that is right about it in a minute. We all know that, but it is very right in me to remember it, isn't it? It shows, I think, that I really deserve to be grown up."

Both the ladies expressed their approbation, and agreed with her in thinking that it was a very good sign, and certainly showed that she was already growing steady; and having listened to this satisfactory opinion, Mary ran off to find her papa, but she failed to do so, as he had just set off for a walk round the park with his bailiff; but though she failed of finding him, she encountered another person, to whom she was so eager to announce the great news she had to tell, that she speedily forgot the necessity of consulting her father, notwithstanding the peculiarly important subject to which she wished to draw his attention.

“ Oh, Lucy! my darling child!” she exclaimed on running against a young girl, who was passing the door of her father’s library as she came out of it. “ Oh, Lucy! I am so glad you are come back! What a dear good soul your mother was not to keep you! Come with me into my room this moment—never mind your bonnet and shawl! I have such news for you, Lucy!”

And Mary, notwithstanding the urgent necessity of talking which was upon her, thinking it would be more agreeable to tell her tale seated in the pleasant retirement of her own dressing-room, than while hurrying along the corridor which led to it, actually ceased speaking, and preceded the young girl she had met, in silence.

In her room she found her maid engaged in some of the duties of her office, but she dismissed her with saying, “ Off with you, Marshall! I want to have a secret confabulation with Lucy Dalton. And besides, I can tell you, that you need not trouble yourself to fiddle faddle about the bows of that bonnet. I don’t think I shall ever wear it again.”

“ Oh, very well, miss,” replied the woman. “ I

do think it begins to look rather shabby, though you have not had it very long, either."

"Off with you! Off with you!" repeated Mary, and pushing her out of the room she shut the door and bolted it.

"Now then, sit you down there, Lucy Dalton, and I will sit down here," said the heiress, placing the coachman's daughter in a commodious arm-chair; and seating herself opposite to her on the dressing stool which stood before her toilet, she looked at her steadily for a moment, and then said, "I hope you wont dislike it, Lucy. Oh! I have such strange news to tell you!"

But before giving any account of the conversation which followed, a few words of description must be bestowed upon the two young girls now seated face to face.

Two young girls of nearly the same age, but, though both pretty, producing a striking contrast in form, and feature, have often been described before.

Hero and Beatrice, Celia and Rosalind, Hermia and Helena, Olivia and Sophia, Minna and Brenda, and a multitude of other pretty pairs, have left their

well-defined portraits upon the imaginations, one might almost say upon the memories of millions—but among them all there cannot be found a more remarkable contrast than was offered by Mary Clementson, the wealthy heiress of Dalbury Park, and her dear friend Lucy Dalton, the penniless orphan of the *ci-devant* Dalbury Park coachman.

In all the cases above cited, the contrast between the different pairs was moral, as well as physical; that is to say, not only were they contrasted because they were short and tall; fair and brown; black eyed and blue eyed; but also because they were grave and gay; gentle and piquante; thoughtful and thoughtless.

But, if I remember rightly, they were all of them tolerably good girls. And it is herein that my pair differed from all I have cited.

They were indeed, though both very pretty, exceedingly unlike in person, and as perfectly the types of two different styles, as a painter would wish to find. But though Mary's eyes were as black as ink, and as rich and soft-looking as velvet, and Lucy's of the clearest, palest blue; though Mary was nut-brown, with the warm blush of a

ripe peach upon her cheek, and Lucy as fair as a lily, stained, as it were, by the colour reflected from a rose; though the dark locks of Mary clustered in natural curls round her small head, and the light long tresses of Lucy lay like smooth bands of silk upon her forehead; though Mary was a well-made little creature of five feet three, and Lucy towering above her, by at least three inches; though all this was so, yet were they, physically, as like as twin sisters, in comparison of the much stronger dissimilitude exhibited in their dispositions and characters.

Mary, though as far as need be from any thing like deficiency of intellect, invariably believed every thing that was said to her. She really had no practical idea whatever of what lying meant. Lucy had.

Mary, though the most outrageously petted child that ever parents tried to spoil, was as unselfish as the generous sun—she would have given light, and life, and joy to all the world, if she could—but her own little self was the last thing she thought about.

Herself was, indeed, the last thought of Lucy too—but then it was the first likewise.

Mary was such a loving little soul, that it was as much as she could do not to love the wasps that would not let her father eat his greengages in peace, after she had dragged the gardener's ladder from one end of the great terrace to the other, in order to climb up to pick for him the very biggest and ripest that ever were seen.

Lucy had no such weakness. Whatever feeling happened to be uppermost in the mind of Mary, she was pretty sure to betray it—for she had very little self-control, and if at any time she did suspect that she had better not tell every body exactly every thing she thought, her attempts at concealment were very awkward indeed.

Lucy, on the contrary, never felt so much at her ease as when she was making believe.

It would be easy to go on for a dozen pages enumerating various points of difference between these two young girls, but enough has been said already to help the reader's observation in comprehending what is to follow.

"Now guess, Lucy! What do you think my father has been saying to me this morning?"

Lucy fixed her large pale eyes upon her with a look of the most languishing softness, and most people, if they had looked at her, would have thought that tears were either come or coming.

"Tell me any thing but one!" she replied, in a voice that seemed to tremble from emotion.

"Why, what are you afraid of, silly girl?" returned Mary, looking at her affectionately, "I'll bet sixpence you are thinking something about our being parted! something about your being sent away! You have never got poor dear Mrs. Morris's question out of your head—her asking if you were to go to Paris with us next year, put you in a panic, silly child. As if I should ever let you be parted from me!"

"Then it is *not* that, Miss Mary?" said Lucy, suddenly showing all her fine teeth in a most bewitching smile. "Then you may go on, and say what you will, Miss Clementson. You can't vex me now, I defy you."

"Vex you, you little goose. Who is going to vex you? Why, my dear, I expect you will be half wild with joy when you hear my news."

“Then it must be something calculated to make *you* very *very* happy, Mary,” said Lucy, with plaintive tenderness.

“How you do love me, Lucy!” said Mary, a real pearl-drop rising, and then dispersing itself over her velvet eye. “I only wish I deserved it, but that I never can do, so it is no good wishing. But foolish as it is of you, it shows what your own heart is, Lucy, and I do love you heartily in return, my poor dear girl, that is very certain. But now for my news, Lucy Dalton. Fancy my father’s telling me this morning, that in talking over my age with all the ladies and gentlemen he met at dinner yesterday, they all made up their minds to think that I was old enough to be considered as grown up, and that I am to go out always with him, and, what is ten thousand times the best of all, he is going to invite everybody in the world almost, to a ball. Fancy a ball, with lots of fiddles, Lucy, in this very house! Not one pitiful squeaking little bit of a fiddle, like the dancing-master’s, but real, beautiful, musical fiddles, such as Mrs. Morris is so fond of talking about. I wonder, though, if they will play waltzes as well as she does! And oh!

Lucy, I wonder if any of the gentlemen partners I shall have will dance as well as Mademoiselle Panache! Wont it be beautiful if they do? But why don't you speak, Lucy? You don't say a single word."

"Is it not better to listen, my dear young lady, than to speak myself?" replied Lucy, with a gentle sigh. "Your dear voice is the voice of gladness, and what would mine be?"

"And pray, if you please, why should it not be the voice of gladness too?" said Mary, looking vexed.

"Dearest Miss Clementson," returned the humble friend, with another deep sigh, "let your own heart answer you. Lovely and attractive as you are in every way, how is it possible to doubt that as soon as you are seen and known, you will be admired, loved, and and very, oh! very soon married! People talk and write of widowed hearts, Miss Clementson, but where will you find the heart so truly widowed as mine will be then?"

For about half a moment the young heiress seemed as if she were going to cry, but then her drooping eyes looked brightly up again, and she exclaimed, "I certainly am the very happiest girl in the world,

Lucy, not because I am so very likely, as you say, to be married to-morrow, or the day after at farthest," she continued, laughing, "upon my word I don't mean that, but because every body loves me so! The very first thought that came into the two heads of my dear good governesses, when I told them my news, was sorrow from their fear of being parted from me. And now you, my poor dear darling girl, are just like them. I certainly do love you all very much in return, and you, most of all, Lucy; but still it is plain that my good-for-nothing selfish heart cannot really be so affectionate as either theirs, or yours, Lucy, because no thought or fear about parting ever came into my head at all. I seemed to see nothing before me but *fêtes* and fun, and joy and jubilee. And let me see it all bright before me still, Lucy, will you? It is so pleasant to shut up our eyes for a moment, this way, look Lucy, and then to see in one's fancy a sort of beautiful flowery country, full of gay people, and music and flowers and dancing; but then I fancy *you* walking and dancing through it by my side, remember."

"Ah, Miss Mary! There is the fatal difference," replied Lucy mournfully; "when your fancy draws

pictures, you can fill them with what company you like, because it will always be in your power, you know, to say who shall, and who shall not, be with you. But have I the same power, Miss Clementson?"

Now there was more than one thing in this speech that was out of tune with the gaiety of Mary's heart at that moment. In the first place there was too near an approach to the truth in the hint thrown out respecting the dependant helplessness of Lucy's own condition. And then, Mary hated to be called Miss Clementson by her.

What made both these woes the greater, was the consciousness that she had no power to change either. The first, and most important, had of late often given her some painful moments of meditation ; for Lucy was not only the daughter of the late Dalbury coachman, but, what was much worse, she had a particularly troublesome mother still alive, who, in the first place, was not always sober, and who, in the second, liked nothing so well as to pass unexpectedly into Miss Clementson's drawing-room from time to time, for the glory of seeing her daughter seated beside the young lady, on terms of

the most perfect equality, either reading, or being read to, working at the frame, or winding worsteds; very busy or very idle, as the chance might be, which chance affected Mary and Lucy alike.

To witness this, was great, tall, bold-looking Mrs. Dalton's especial delight, and Mary had already felt some disagreeable twitches given her by her common sense, concerning the embarrassments and difficulties likely to arise from this state of affairs.

But Mary loved her lang-syne playfellow so affectionately, that these thoughts had hitherto always been smothered before they had grown into sufficient form and strength to produce any effect. And as to the other annoyance, namely, that of being called Miss Clementson, there was a very particular reason why Mary could not exert her power to prevent it. Her father had made her understand that he wished it should be so.

His system of keeping Mary to himself, had made him adopt, rather too eagerly, the convenient scheme of "*having in*" the coachman's little girl to play with her. There is an age at which, perhaps, there is no serious objection to such companionship. The objection lies in the difficulty of putting a stop to

it when the time arrives to make the doing so desirable. Besides, this time is not very easily defined, and kind hearts, and sweet tempers, are easily beguiled into forgetting in such circumstances the very particularly sure progress of years till it is too late to do what is right, without seeming at the same time to do what is wrong.

There is something so very like tyranny, and pride, and cruelty, in telling two young creatures who love each other dearly, that, though living, perhaps, within a ten minutes' run of each other, they must meet no more, that Mr. Clementson would have found it easier to cut off his left hand with his right, than to do it. Yet he, too, occasionally felt a pinch from common sense, which roused him to the conviction that it would not quite do to let the little girls grow up on terms of perfect equality. But the only very strong measure which he adopted to prevent it, was the telling Lucy that she must try to break herself of calling his daughter by her christian name, in the same manner that Mary addressed her; and that she must always say "Miss Mary" or "Miss Clementson."

This restriction, which was not promulgated till

the children were about twelve years old, was exceedingly disagreeable to both of them. Mary felt that it was like telling Lucy to leave off some of her love for her ; but Lucy's feelings were greatly stronger. The command rankled in her heart, and generated something fearfully like hatred both to father and daughter.

For the most part, however, she obeyed the grating injunction, as she would have done any other from the same source; for what would she not have done rather than risk offending the squire of Dalbury? Yet from time to time, as if from an irresistible outbreak of tenderness, Mary was still Mary to her, and she was only Miss Clementson when she wished to hurt the sensitive affection of her unsuspecting companion, *Miss Mary* being the half-way point between the other two.

Now, therefore, that the gentle-hearted heiress listened to Lucy's words, the consciousness that there was, indeed, a very painfully great distance between them, came more home to her heart and her understanding than it had ever done before, and, considerably to the surprise of Lucy, she burst into tears.

Few people of her age had a greater aptitude in finding out what was really passing (sometimes, perhaps, unconsciously) in the hearts of those she was conversing with, than Lucy Dalton. But now she was completely puzzled. She had been so far from feeling there was any real danger that Mary, whom she thought she could always manage, should throw her off, that it never occurred to her that the young lady herself could think such a separation *possible*, and she would probably have experienced a more vehement emotion of alarm as to her future prospects, than had ever before seized upon her, had she fully understood the cause of Mary's tears.

As it was, however, she came to the conclusion, after staring at her in vain for a minute or two, that her own words and accents had been too touching to be listened to with indifference, and she, therefore, condescended to soothe her by saying,

"But you must not mind me, Miss Mary; I dare say every thing will be very gay and happy, and if I see you enjoying it all, you may be very sure that I shall enjoy it too."

"And so you shall, dearest, if I can make you,"

replied Mary, kissing her; "and, at any rate, don't let us ever be sorrowful, Lucy, when there is no cause *really* come to make us so."

"At any rate—cause really come!" repeated Lucy, internally, as the true shape of Mary's fears suddenly broke upon her. "Nay, then," was her next thought, "I must turn the first precious period of this coming out to profit. I must waste no time, nor let any chance escape me."

CHAPTER V.

To say that the whole neighbourhood was as much occupied by the approaching ball at Dalbury Park, as the Dalbury family themselves, would certainly be an exaggeration, but this perfectly novel event, now formally announced to the whole country by very widely-extended invitations, did certainly excite a great sensation.

The closely-joined knot of gentlemen's places immediately round the little town of Compton, had their attention divided, however, between the novelty of a *fête* given at one of the finest houses in the country, but which had kept its doors shut for the last ten years, and the equally startling novelty of a gentleman, introduced by Lord Randal as a new acquaintance, brought down for the shooting

season, coming forth to the surprise and admiration of every one happy enough to be introduced to him, as the most accomplished, the most fascinating, the most highly-gifted individual they had ever known or heard of in that part of the world.

Theodore Vidal was, in truth, an extraordinary man, so extraordinary indeed, so striking in person, manner, intellect, and acquirement, that Lord Randal had more questions asked concerning him than he had any power to answer, for, in fact, Lord Randal knew little or nothing about him.

He had twice met him at very good dinner-tables in London, and on both occasions it happened that the young man had made himself the admiration of the whole society by the peculiar brilliancy with which he spoke on every subject brought forward. After one of these dinners, there had been a music party in the evening, at which Mr. Vidal had accompanied one lady on the flute, another on the pianoforte, and with a third he had sung an Italian duet in a style that brought down thunders of applause. When the music was over, a charade was proposed, and here Mr. Vidal again displayed so much talent, and such graceful facility in bringing

it forward, that Lord Randal desired he might be introduced to him, and subsequently, upon meeting him one morning at one of the fashionable clubs, and falling into chat with him upon various subjects, he had found him so very delightful a companion, that he had given him the invitation which had produced his present visit to Shropshire, where he had not continued a week before he had been entreated to come and kill pheasants as soon as he had done with Lord Randal's partridges, by more than one of the neighbouring gentlemen.

Theodore Vidal was one of those very rare personages who have the power of making themselves equally agreeable to men and to women. Not, indeed, that he had obtained this remarkable success without taking the trouble of making some slight alterations in his manner, and, one might almost say, in his features also, in order to attain it. Mr. Vidal was always delightful, but not always the same. Yet in this there was really no mixture of art or affectation. In both cases he was inspired by a wish to please, and as the species of inspiration varied, so did the result that it produced.

As to describing his various powers of mind, his

brilliant talents, or the wonderful multiplicity of his acquirements, it must not be attempted; the reader as he goes on will become better acquainted with him than any mere description could make him. As to his personal appearance, we must endeavour to convey some idea of it, but even this, though in general an easy task, is in his case much less so than usual.

He was rarely seen by any stranger without an inquiry following as to who he was, and yet none, but a woman in love with him, would have called him a handsome man. Like all well-made people, he looked less tall than he really was, but his actual height did not exceed five feet nine inches, so that he was never called a tall man; but a statuary might have been well contented to have had him for a model. His features, however, were much less regular than the proportions of his slight, but powerful limbs, yet he could not be called a plain man either. His nose was decidedly too long, but then it was almost as straight as those of the warriors whose portraits Lord Elgin saved from being converted into mortar. His upper lip, at least when compared with the lower one, was too thin, but then

it was so classically short, and curled so expressively as feeling dictated, that it was difficult to find much fault with it. His eyes were long and narrow—so narrow indeed as to give them the appearance of being for ever half shut. But this defect was in some degree atoned for by the remarkable length and fulness of his black eyelashes, which gave very effective shadow and expression to the upper part of his face. The eyes were light, but at times emitted from behind this dark curtain a gleam of extraordinary brightness. His face was rather long, his complexion pale, but without any appearance of ill health, his hair and beard nearer black than is common in an Englishman, and his teeth, which were peculiarly small, were white and regular.

Such was the exterior of the man, who, before he had been resident a week in the somewhat aristocratic neighbourhood of Compton, had contrived to excite and occupy the attention of every family within its circle. As to who, or what he was, nobody seemed to think it particularly necessary to inquire. Lord Randal, in answer to one bold and direct inquiry on the subject, had explicitly confessed himself entirely ignorant; but as he added to this confession an

equally explicit statement, that he moved in the very highest London society, it seemed to be generally admitted that any further requisitions on this point were not only unnecessary, but would be extremely impertinent to Lord Randal.

Many dinner-parties, in some degree in compliment to this gentleman, succeeded that which has been already described; indeed, the neighbourhood, particularly during the autumn and early winter, was always peculiarly sociable, meeting often, and with less of stiffness and ceremony than is usually found at country dinings out.

Mr. Vidal declared himself enchanted with all the neighbours, which was no more than was right, for they were all very decidedly enchanted with him—all, that is to say, excepting one individual:—Arthur Lexington detested him.

The beauty, *par excellence*, of that part of the county of Salop, was Clara Maynard. Mr. Lexington, who was sixteen years her senior, had watched her grow from an enchanting child, into a beautiful girl, and from a beautiful girl into a lovely woman. He had studied her closely, and he thought he knew her well; and so he did, with the sole exception of

one small corner of her heart. He did *not* know, nor had he ever suspected, that he was himself the object of that pure young heart's first love. Some young ladies begin flirting at a very early age, and then they are quizzed about their conquests, and about losing their hearts, and the like, and all perhaps (pretty young creatures!) without their ever having made, or received an impression deep enough to survive the absence of a month. But there are other young ladies, who never seem to amuse themselves in this way at all, but who now and then surrender an almost childish heart, even before it is asked for, and that with a silent, secret depth of devotion which is never suspected, either by the object beloved, or by any one else; and such an attachment Arthur Lexington had inspired in the heart of Clara Maynard.

She was not one of the many young ladies who love without knowing it; on the contrary, she had been at the age of seventeen, or a little before, perfectly aware that she loved Mr. Lexington with her whole heart.

But though she knew this, she did not know that he loved her quite as devotedly as she loved him,

nor had he the least intention that she should ever know it. A marriage between them would have been one of those frightfully imprudent acts from which the mind shrinks, even before the ripe age of thirty-five, if it be a reasonable and an honourable mind.

Arthur Lexington had been educated at Eton, and afterwards travelled with his father, who was a colonel in the army, over almost every part of the continent of Europe. The five years thus spent, had not been without their advantage as a part of the young man's education; but when they were over, and the father and son again settled in England, they both became aware that he had not acquired much that was likely to assist him in preparing for the bar, for which the colonel had uniformly declared he was intended, almost from the hour of his birth.

So all thoughts of a profession were given up, by mutual consent; a commodious first-floor in one of the best houses in Compton was taken, and nicely fitted up for their residence, and there they lived together, a pleasant sort of lazy literary life, with abundance of country visiting, licence to shoot and to fish through every manor in the neigh-

bourhood, plenty of pretty woodland sketching for the skilful pencil of Arthur, a very respectable collection of books of their own, and free access to those of all their neighbours, and with much fewer of the cares of life than fall to the lot of mortals in general.

No reasonable man could complain of this fate as a hard one—nor did Arthur Lexington. Yet he felt that he would gladly have exchanged the *dolce far niente* of his peaceful existence, for the most laborious profession that ever tried the strength of man, so he might have received the hand of Clara Maynard for his reward.

But as this wish was as vain as a longing for the moon would have been, he never permitted any human being to know that he had formed it. It had not been possible for him wholly to conceal from Clara the fact that he liked to talk with her, walk with her, draw with her, and dance with her, and certain it is, that from the age of seventeen to eighteen, the enamoured girl did live in the sweet hope that Arthur loved her, but thought her still too much a child to tell her so.

But when she had completed her eighteenth

year, she began to think, that if indeed Arthur Lexington loved, and had any thought of marrying her, he could not thus go on, for ever seeing her, yet never uttering a syllable that could be interpreted into an avowal of such a thought. It might be, too, that as she grew older, his caution increased, and thus that she saw less and less reason to hope. But, whatever the cause, nearly a year had now elapsed since Clara had begun to make the task of curing herself from this attachment the first object of her life.

The contempt with which her own weakness inspired her, was too painful to be borne, and had Arthur known all the repentant struggles of that innocent heart, he might have doubted whether, after all, it might not have been better to have offered himself and his three hundred a year, than suffer her to endure the anguish of unrequited love. For alas! three hundred a year was all that Arthur could ever hope to possess.

His father had now been dead some years, and of course his half pay died with him, and the one only contingent hope which had often soothed the too fond father during his life, might pretty nearly

be accounted dead also—for the colonel's only sister, who had at fifty years of age been left a childless widow with about eighty thousand pounds at her own disposal, had a year or two before the time of which we are speaking, bestowed herself and her sixty-five years of wisdom upon a husband rather too young to be her son. This happy juvenile was a Frenchman, Paris having been selected by the wealthy widow as her residence, soon after her first husband's death.

When Colonel Lexington and his son had passed through France on their way to and from Italy, they had spent a few days in her society; and, though they had found her wigged and rouged to rather a disagreeable excess, they had neither of them anticipated the matrimonial catastrophe which followed.

She had written to Arthur, to announce her marriage; and to this letter he had returned a perfectly civil and respectful answer, but had never heard from her again. All hope, therefore, from this quarter had pretty nearly vanished, and she was, in fact, as nearly forgotten by her nephew as possible.

Such was his pecuniary position; and Clara being rather poorer than himself, he was, at the time he was introduced to the reader, wearing life away in an earnest, and now quite habitual endeavour to consider Clara as his sister.

This course of rigid self-discipline was not persevered in without considerable suffering; and there were moments, perhaps hours, during which poor Arthur might have been found on the bank of his favourite trout stream, his fishing-rod lying idle on one side, and his sketch-book on the other, while he sat with his back against a tree, and his arms in the saddest possible knot, ruminating on all the bliss that life could give, but which it never would give to him. And then he did certainly sometimes think himself one of the most unhappy men alive.

But when he thought thus, he little knew how much sharper misery was in store for him! Clara, on her part, had now pretty well succeeded in subduing the painful consciousness of loving without being loved in return. Of Mr. Lexington's indifference she had long been convinced; and deeply rooted as her affection for him had been, there was something of maiden pride at her heart, which she

flattered herself—and perhaps she was not wholly wrong—had conquered its weakness.

When Clara first saw Mr. Vidal, she believed herself to be completely fancy free, and it was not altogether without pleasure that she perceived the impression she had made upon him. This impression was, however, much stronger than she had at first any idea of herself; for she certainly guessed not, that after the very first evening they had passed together—namely, that which has been already described as succeeding his arrival at the house of Lord Randal—he had fully made up his mind to ask her hand in marriage, though his fortune, not very much larger than that of Lexington, scarcely justified so rash a deed, and would to most men have suggested such reasonable doubts of success as might in a great measure have destroyed the exquisite happiness which he enjoyed in her society.

But it was not so with Theodore Vidal. Perhaps one great source of the irresistible charm which he seemed to possess, was the vivacity, the intensity of all his feelings. And joined to this, he was in all things, and on all occasions, cheered and inspired by such buoyant, animated, confident an-

anticipations of success, that his spirits never flagged, nor did he ever fail, on any occasion, or under any circumstances, of being able to bring into full action all the good gifts that nature had bestowed upon him.

That this arose from a species of high self-appreciation, which in other men would have been called conceit, is very certain. It had nothing to do with mere animal spirits, or constitutional hilarity. His gaiety was the result of his undoubting anticipation of success, not the cause of it. No. From his very earliest childhood, Theodore Vidal never heard of any thing to be done, achieved, performed, and executed by mortal man, without feeling certain that he could do it—and better too, than any body else in the whole world.

There were many things about this young man's character, his abilities, and extraordinary powers of pleasing, that were very remarkable; but none more so, perhaps, than the manner in which a quality, usually so distasteful as conceit, actually assisted him in fascinating every one he came near; and, better still, it fascinated himself into a state of mind which had rendered him, during by far the

greater portion of his existence, a very peculiarly happy man.

His first glance at Clara Maynard convinced him that he now beheld the woman whom nature must have made expressly for him. She was precisely, oh! precisely all and every thing his taste, his heart, his imagination could desire; and had she, oh! had she a moderate fortune, a very moderate fortune, only, in fact, such a fortune as, joined to what remained of his own, might enable them to live with common decency, she should be his wife.

The second glance convinced him, beyond the power of fate to shake the conviction, that she was precisely the sort of being capable of *properly* appreciating him. He knew, yes, he knew with very satisfactory certainty, that he was a good deal admired; but he was convinced that he had never yet been *fully* appreciated. It required all the depth of feeling, the elevation of intellect, the unspeakable capability of devoted passion, which he read in her heavenly eyes, to enable a woman to do him justice. And now, oh heavens! he had found it.

“How mysterious are the vagaries of chance!”

he inwardly exclaimed. "Was ever any thing so casual, so *will*, and *won't*, so *can* and *can't*, as my manner of receiving and accepting the invitation which brought me here? Yet, behold!—merciful, sweet Heaven!—would not my whole existence have been a *coup manqué*, a failure, an abortion, if any power in earth, hell, or heaven, had prevented my coming hither!"

It was no impeachment to the intense sincerity with which this rhapsody was inwardly breathed, that something very like it had been breathed a few times before. Theodore Vidal was at that moment as vehemently in love as it was possible for him to be. Nor would this have been by any means a sufficiently strong statement to satisfy him, for not only did he know and feel that he was as much in love as it was possible for him to be, but also that nature had endowed him with powers of loving, ten thousand times stronger than were ever bestowed upon any other man.

"Happy, happy angel!" was his next mental soliloquy; "How, for the first time since thy fair eyes did first behold the sun, art thou surrounded with such an atmosphere of love as may be called thy

native element. Ay, sweet one! and thou shalt feel the heaven-born rapture of having reached it! As yet she knows not, pretty soul! she cannot guess the marvellous, the astounding change that is approaching her! How sweetly, still how innocently unconscious does she look of the torrent of delicious passion that is about to overwhelm her! Pretty soul! A few short days, and she shall know, her happy, happy Theodore shall teach her, what it is to love!"

But notwithstanding the tumult of impassioned feeling into which this reverie threw Theodore Vidal, it did not cause him to forget what he knew to be the first and most important of all his social duties, namely, the taking care not to miss the very earliest opportunity of ingratiating himself with *all* the strangers among whom he had fallen. Nay, on the contrary, his new-born passion made him only the more fully aware of the great importance of pursuing, at the present moment, what he called his own peculiar "social system;" and, accordingly, he managed, with admirable tact, to make and take a multitude of little opportunities, which never would have occurred to any other man, of address-

ing a few words to every individual of the party assembled at Lord Randal's, without, in any single instance, exposing himself to the ever-ready English observation made upon strangers who venture to speak before they are spoken to.

And what was the secret art by which he thus contrived, with scarcely a single failure, from the beginning of his "social" career, to the end of it, what was the secret art by which he thus contrived to make every body to whom he had spoken once, wish to be so spoken to again?

The question might be answered by a single word, but such an answer, though it would give the truth, would not give the whole truth. This single word would be FLATTERY, but many more words would be necessary to make Theodore Vidal's "social system" intelligible; so many, indeed, that it might be a painful trial of patience to the intelligent reader if they were all poured out upon him at once. The better plan, perhaps, will be to let Mr. Theodore Vidal occasionally speak for himself. Yet it may not be amiss to record briefly the remarks made upon him by each individual of the

party who dined at Lord Randal's on the day of his arrival.

Lady Randal said to her lord, before she moved from the drawing-room to her own apartment, "I give you credit, dear Randal, for having imported that young man. He is very well-looking, perfectly gentlemanlike, and wonderfully quick in observing what is pretty and graceful. You know I rather pique myself on the arrangement of my books and dear nick-nackeries in the little drawing-room, and he had not been down stairs five minutes before I saw him doing homage to it all. He saw that I was observing him, and an ordinary-minded sort of person would have made my ladyship a fine speech upon my taste and my treasures. But your Mr. Vidal knew better. He had, somehow or other, contrived to find out, by the aid of physiognomy, I suppose, that I hate and detest flattery; and, after looking for several minutes with very earnest attention at the pretty *coup d'œil*, an expression of admiration and pleasure came over his singularly speaking features, which I cannot describe; but he spoke not a word. He only turned round a little, and fixing his eyes upon me for half a moment, gave me *such*

a smile. It would be worth while to exercise a little good taste and knowledge of effect, if every body felt the result of it like your new acquaintance. But people in general have eyes,

“ That seem at most
To guard a master 'gainst a post.”

* * * * *

The shy bachelor geological gentleman, Mr. Norman, had happened to take up a fossil that lay among the miscellaneous treasures of one of Lady Randal's richly-loaded little tables, and having subjected it to the scientific ordeal of a wet finger, had deemed it worth the compliment of being examined through his spectacles. Nay, even this did not satisfy him till he had carried it to the window, and looked at it with the advantage of all the light he could get.

This was quite enough for Vidal. The fossil acted as a hand-post, pointing out the way to the old gentleman's heart, and, notwithstanding all the accomplished stranger had upon his hands that day, falling in love included, he found time, before the evening was over, to drop into a chair beside Mr. Norman, and to say, “ I suspect, sir, from the man-

ner in which I saw you examine that interesting fossil, that you are a brother geologist. Will you have the kindness to tell me if I shall find any use for my hammer in the immediate neighbourhood of Compton?"

A few minutes of very interesting conversation followed, interrupted (of course to Mr. Vidal's very evident regret) by some one's passing near them, for whose convenience the young man thought it was necessary to remove his chair. But the colloquy had lasted long enough to make a considerable impression upon Mr. Norman, the nature of which may be inferred from the muttered exclamation of the old gentleman as he drew up the window of his carriage, and drove off, "I wish I had not shilly-shallied as I did with Betsy Baker forty years ago. I should like to have been the father of such a young fellow as that. But, at any rate, I may ask him to dinner, and perhaps I might get him to pass a few days with me."

Mr. Clementson had been a good deal struck, and a good deal touched too, by the manner in which Vidal, after looking at him earnestly for a moment while he was saying something about his daughter

Mary, uttered, in a half whisper the word, "Charming!"

He had made Mrs. General Springfield completely his own, by giving her one single glance, and half a smile, as he replied, when asked by Lord Randal, if he loved music, "Yes, my lord I do, when it is 'wedded to immortal verse:'" and her son was quite ready to "swear an eternal friendship" to him upon his saying, after listening to about half a dozen quotations, "If there be one gift of Heaven that I envy, it is the possession of that blessed species of memory which enables a man to make all the finest thoughts that have ever been conceived, his own!"

The eldest Miss Springfield saw him turn over the leaves of one of Mrs. Hemans' volumes, till he came to that which contained some stanzas which she had been herself reading the moment before—he too read them, and making her a slight bow as he closed the volume, he breathed the very lightest possible sigh, and whispered, "They deserve it!" The youngest felt the same sort of emotion from head to foot which had affected the eldest, after the above trifling occurrence had passed, upon Mr.

Vidal's saying, when Lady Randal addressed the company with the every evening's question, "Does any body choose to play cards?"

"Soon as *she* spreads her hand, the aerial guard
Descend, and sit on each important card."

But the words would probably not have affected her so strongly, had not Theodore laid a decided emphasis on the pronoun *she*, and ventured at the same time to look in her rather pretty young face.

The only attention which circumstances enabled him to attract from Sir William Monkton was shown by a nod, a smile, and an invitation to take wine, produced by a very unobtrusive bit of *by play*. Several "books of beauty" were lying upon a table, round which some of the party were lounging, while waiting for the announcement of dinner. Sir William had one of these volumes in his hand, and Vidal another. Sir William came upon a head which seemed to enchant him, but Vidal, more fortunate still, had opened upon another of decidedly superior loveliness. Sir William having gazed his fill upon his beauty, turned over the pages to look for another charmer; but as each soft languisher

met his eye, he turned her over, exclaiming in a fretful tone, "Bah!—bah!—bah!" and at length he threw down the volume. Upon which Vidal, without taking the liberty of speaking, laid *his* beauty immediately before Sir William's eyes. Then came the nod, and the smile, and then the announcement of dinner, and before it was over, the well-pleased Theodore was rewarded by Sir William's asking him to take wine.

But in the case of Lady Sarah, he was more successful still. Having lived for five years abroad, this lady, who had once been a celebrated beauty, and who was still very attractive, had really got so accustomed to have some man or other, old or young, married or single, devoted to her for the time being, that she could not do without it—at least not well—she was apt to grow fidgetty, and perhaps a little cross, without such an appendage, and the dinings-out of a country neighbourhood in England, might have tried her temper perhaps a little too severely had she not always taken very decisive measures upon all occasions to appropriate to herself, whomever she might happen to consider as the most attractive man in company. Theodore

Vidal upon this occasion had decidedly no competitor, and when obliged by her rank to take the arm of Lord Randal to the dinner-table, she scrupled not to tell the youngest Miss Springfield, to whom the arm of Vidal had been assigned, that they must sit next her.

They did so ; and little good did the Lord Randal get from his vicinity to the fascinating Lady Sarah, or Miss Edith Springfield from being seated next to the admired Theodore Vidal; for from the time they sat down to that at which Lady Randal, after arranging the last finger of her last glove, and then not without a feeling of compunction at destroying so animated a *tête-à-tête*, gave the irresistible nod which tore them asunder, had either of them spoken a word, save to the other.

Neither the one nor the other had, indeed, appeared conscious that any other person had been in the room with them, save the automatons of the sideboard. As the dinner was a long one, it is impossible in this instance to repeat all the *ben trovato* hints by which Theodore contrived to make Lady Sarah understand that he had never—no, never in the whole course of his too varied, too ex-

citable, too impassioned, existence, encountered a being so made up of every creature's best as her ladyship!

And never, no never perhaps, had he displayed more perfect and profound sagacity in the conduct of his affairs, than upon this occasion—for when it is remembered that the stage which conveyed him from the London Railroad to Compton, had arrived at that little town but forty minutes before Lord Randal's dinner-hour, and moreover, that Vidal had never, to the best of his knowledge and belief, heard the name of Lady Sarah Monkton before, it certainly showed a very brilliant degree of tact to have reached the place he now held in her estimation.

But Vidal never let any thing escape him. Her title had caught his ear, before she had been in the drawing-room five seconds—her recent return from the continent was stamped upon his memory within a quarter of an hour. Her dress was coquettish, Frenchly coquettish, and spoke a language which he understood as well as his alphabet. Then she had eyes that were neither idle, nor unmeaning—and neither last, nor least, he had obtained possession of

the fact, that Monkton Vine was a finer place than Randal Oaks.

Does any one ask, whether this accurate attention to every thing connected with Lady Sarah must not have interfered with the passionate process going on in his heart at the same moment respecting Clara Maynard? The answer, equally true, and astonishing is, NO, not the least in the world. Had Theodore Vidal been capable of attending to only one thing at a time, he would never have been the man he was.

As to the means by which he managed with so much business on his hands, as the first few hours of acquaintance with an entirely new set of people must of necessity bring; how, notwithstanding this, he managed to send such a girl as Clara home to her pillow with her thoughts *almost* entirely engrossed by him, can only be understood by those who personally know Vidal. It would take a dozen volumes to describe all the exquisitely minute occasions which he found to make her comprehend how immeasurably more he was occupied with her than with those with whom dining and drawing-room accidents had obliged him to converse. Those who

do know Vidal, will easily understand this to have been possible. Those who do not, must take it upon trust.

No very peculiar powers, however, were necessary in order to propitiate the very kindest feelings of Miss Elizabeth Jenkins' heart. He observed, any man might have observed, the skilful manner in which she contrived to mention her poor dear mother, Lady Arabella, no less than four times during the by no means unreasonably long interval which elapsed before dinner was announced. He looked at her, and read safety, as to dates, in the deep frowns' feet and puckered throat of the nobly-mothered spinster, and considerably before she had been handed out to take her place in Mr. Clementson's carriage, he had contrived to say to her, in an accent of deep interest, "I have often heard my dear mother talk of Lady Arabella Jenkins. My poor dear mother died many years later than her ladyship. But, notwithstanding the difference of age, they were great friends."

This was quite enough. A handsome young man, who might be constantly addressed on the subject of her poor dear mother, Lady Arabella,

was a treasure, the value of which Miss Elizabeth Jenkins fully appreciated. Nor did she make her final courtesy, or utter the last of her many good nights, without explaining to him that she and her sister, and her niece, Miss Clara Maynard, lived in a venerable mansion, which had been an immense number of years in the family, called the Town Head House, and that they should all be extremely happy to see him there, if he would do them the favour of calling.

"I consider the meeting you, Miss Jenkins, as one of the most fortunate incidents that ever happened to me," he replied; "you have no idea how my mind clings to every thing connected with the memory of my beloved mother."

These words quite affected Miss Jenkins, probably because she thought so much of her own revered parent; and she certainly pressed the hand which assisted her to mount the carriage, as she repeated, "Come to see us, Mr. Vidal! pray come to see us!"

"I will," he replied, returning the friendly pressure. And of all his successes that evening, it was perhaps this which delighted him the most.

Nor was the effect produced by Mr. Theodore Vidal upon Mr. Arthur Lexington, less remarkable or less decisive than that experienced by all the rest of Lord Randal's guests. But it was of a different kind. Mr. Arthur Lexington did not think Mr. Theodore Vidal the most fascinating man he had ever met.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVING on this first evening of his arrival thus ably prepared a welcome for himself, let him wander which way he would, Mr. Vidal immediately made up his mind to profit by the favourable impression he had produced on Sir William and Lady Sarah Monkton, before the omnipotent 1st of September should arrive, and oblige him to devote his mornings to the pursuit of partridges; which, though by no means a favourite one with him, had been the ostensible reason for Lord Randal's invitation.

He knew perfectly well, for he had often tried such experiments before, that whatever might be thought of such hasty civility in another man, a call would be felt as a most welcome compliment from him. Lord Randal had already very frankly given

him to understand, as he ever did to all new comers to his mansion, that it was an immutable law at Randal Oaks for neither the lord nor the lady of the domain to undertake to assist their numerous guests in the disposal of their morning hours, except in the field. But no one felt themselves disposed to complain of this; for, at the same time that this law was announced to strangers, they were made to understand, that they would find all appliances, and means to boot, for amusing themselves.

“A horse, my dear lord!—my kingdom for a horse!” said Vidal, after breakfast, on the following morning, in reply to Lord Randal’s saying, “Well, Vidal, what do you mean to do with yourself? will you read, write, fish, ride, or drive?”

“A horse is it?” rejoined his lordship, and immediately ringing the bell, he ordered a horse for Mr. Vidal, and desired also that a groom might be in readiness to attend, in order to show the way to any place whither that gentleman might wish to go.

As he purposed making more visits than one, he requested that the horses might come round at one

o'clock, and at that hour precisely, he mounted, and set off.

"Where is it you wish to go, sir?" said the man, who was well used to the sort of duty he was now upon; "you must please to tell me, sir, before we start, because we have got no less than three lodge gates to the park, all, in course, leading different ways."

Vidal paused for a moment before he answered. Inclination would certainly have led him to name the residence of Clara Maynard, but he did not wish that the Monktons, particularly the Lady Sarah, should hear that he had made any other visit in the neighbourhood, before he had paid his compliments to them. However rapid his progress might be in the good graces of Miss Jenkins, or even of the lovely Clara herself, he knew full well that his present stay in the neighbourhood could not by possibility be lengthened by his finding a domicile with them, whereas he thought it extremely probable that the case might be otherwise at the Vine, and he therefore resolutely answered: "I wish to go to Sir William Monkton's."

"To the Vine, sir; yes, sure, that's the right

road, sir," replied the man; "straight on, sir, if you please;" and a pretty ride between rich hedges brought him in half-an-hour to Monkton Vine.

Vidal was shown into a large drawing-room that was unoccupied, and desired to sit down, while a servant carried in his card to a room beyond. No two handsome drawing-rooms could be less alike than those of Lady Randal and Lady Sarah Monkton. The former was freshly furnished, and in the most finished style of English elegance and comfort. Abundance of sofas, tables, books, and flowers, all evidently arranged for daily use and enjoyment, yet with that sort of orderly confusion which makes the present style of fitting up a room as agreeable to the eye as it is luxurious to the feelings.

The principal drawing-room at the Vine was at least as large and well-proportioned as that at Lord Randal's, but it had been furnished before its present elegant possessors went abroad, and both hangings and carpet were faded, though not much worn. A grand piano was placed against the wall at one end of it; but Lady Sarah was not musical, and therefore there were no music-books visible, nor any trace of lighting up, or music-stool, or, in short, any indi-

cation whatever that the neighbourhood of the instrument was at any hour of the day an inhabited part of the room. There were two richly gilt ornamental slabs between the windows, two large sofas placed at right angles to the handsome fire-place, one spacious round table in the middle of the room, and a magnificent pendant lustre over it. But not even the two dozen of satin chairs ranged round the walls could make the room look habitable, and in fact it was very rarely occupied, excepting when Lady Sarah was fortunate enough to get somebody to play a waltz, and somebody to dance one; and then, lamps and candles of all sorts, and sizes, were collected to light the room, and as long as Lady Sarah could get any one to go on playing, she would go on waltzing, even if she could get no one but her husband as a partner.

In this spacious, but comfortless apartment, Mr. Vidal was left while his card was carried in; but he waited not long before the servant returned, and ushered him into the presence of Lady Sarah. He had, however, to pass through another drawing-room, smaller, and not quite so desolate-looking as the first, yet still having very evidently the air of

being occupied only occasionally, before he reached the retreat of her ladyship.

This was a small room, with a large window opening to the south. An embroidered curtain of white muslin, lined with rose-coloured silk, hung over nearly the whole window, casting a roseate light into the room, which made every thing in it look rather prettier than it really was, and her ladyship among the rest. Had it not been for this, Mr. Vidal would have perceived a still greater difference than he did, between the graceful *élégante* of the evening before, and the recumbent figure in *déshabille*, which he now beheld extended on a couch of her own invention, long enough to permit of a person's sitting at her feet, and having a sort of *table volant* affixed to it, which could be twisted round at pleasure, and which might serve as work, reading, writing, or chess table. Lady Sarah was in *déshabille*, but such a *déshabille* as most pretty women would have preferred to the most elaborate ball dress that ever was worn. Of course it was Parisian, from the little cornette of Mechlin that was loosely tied beneath her chin, to the exquisite bit of embroidered satin which formed her delicate

slipper. Nor had Lady Sarah more skill in selecting a morning costume, than in wearing it.

Never did the most fastidious artist bestow greater care in draping a favourite figure, than Lady Sarah did in draping hers. There was just enough seen, and just enough hid, yet the whole had the appearance of being so perfectly negligent, and unceremonious, that a greater novice than Vidal might have felt disposed to exclaim, with Paul Pry, "I hope I don't intrude?"

But even had Mr. Vidal been capable of entertaining any doubt of the kind, the manner in which the recumbent Lady Sarah received him would have removed it. Nothing, certainly, could be more gracious. "Is it possible!" she exclaimed, half sitting up, and extending her beautiful and ungloved hand to him; "I hardly ventured to hope that we should see you to-day. Monkton will be enchanted! He is dying to show you his little Raffaele."

"And I was dying to come and receive the enchanting reception that my sanguine fancy kept sketching for me during the sleepless hours of last night," replied Vidal; "but to which, with all her

skill, she knew not," he added, "how to give the last enchanting touch. Her witchery is charming. But there is witchery more exquisite still."

"Sleepless hours?" repeated Lady Sarah, looking at him with very touching interest. "We must not let you take it into your head that country air is less salutary than that of London. I must prepare some gentle narcotics for you, Mr. Vidal."

"No, do not!" he replied, seating himself close to the couch. "Cannot your ladyship imagine that there may be states of mind, in which every moment lost in sleep is a positive evil—a robbery, a most atrocious robbery of sensations sacred to—to the best and highest pleasures of existence?"

"Alas! I know not!" she answered, with a sigh as soft, as it was unmeaning. "And yet," she added, after the meditation of a moment, during which her eyes, that were made to express a vast deal of philosophical speculation, were fixed upon his face—"and yet it may be so. Life, especially English life, Mr. Vidal, is so made up of dull realities, so darkly tintured with *triste raison*, that a waking dream may possibly be among its most precious pleasures."

"May be? But it is," returned the young man, with an accent and manner admirably suited to the occasion. "Alas! Lady Sarah," he continued, gently taking the end of a lace scarf, lined with lilac, which was thrown across her shoulders, and pressing it between his hands with wonderful eloquence of expression—"alas! you know not, a woman's heart, I believe, never can know, the marvellous, the entrancing power of an ardent male imagination! Oh! were it not for this, there are moments when the weight of existence would be too, too heavy to bear." And here, as if by accident, he ventured to raise the scarf to his lips.

"Nay, fie upon you! You must not spoil my pretty scarf. Is it not pretty, Mr. Vidal?"

"Pretty!" he exclaimed, "what a question, Lady Sarah! Do you really think that at this moment there is any object in creation that I could think pretty, save one?"

"And what is that, you odd creature? I think there are so many things pretty!" she replied; "for instance, I think that is a very pretty riding-whip which you have got in your hand," and rais-

ing herself from her still recumbent position, she leant forward to take it from him.

He playfully drew back his hand, and she playfully advanced hers.

“Why, you abominable man! I have let you keep possession of half a mile of my beautiful scarf, and you will not trust me with the butt-end of your wicked-looking little whip!” she exclaimed.

“Swear to me that you will treat my whip exactly as I treat your scarf,” he replied, “and I yield it, ransom or no ransom.”

“Well!—let go, then!” said she.

He did let it go, and the whip remained in her hands.

“Now then,” she said, pretending to hold it daintily between her fingers, “what is to be done next?”

“In reply to this question he gently, but fervently, pressed the end of the scarf to his bosom, and then as gently, and, if possible, more fervently still, leant down his head and kissed it.

In reply to this, the lovely lady at his side shook her head, raised the whip in act to strike, and then exclaimed, as she quietly restored it to him,

"Ah! here is Monkton! He will be in ecstasies! You are something quite in his own way. We owe Lord Randal an ovation for bringing you among us!"

And Sir William, whom she had seen passing across the little interval left in the pink curtain, immediately entered the room.

His reception of Mr. Vidal was very nearly as ecstatic as his wife had predicted. He shook the graceful visiter as cordially by the hand as if he had been an old friend, instead of a perfect stranger, and exclaimed,

"Now then, you are a capital good fellow! Sarah, have you no grapes, no Champagne to refresh the throat of a dusty horseman on such a morning as this? There positively is something a little resembling sunshine this morning, and, in truth, this month and the two next are the only portion of the year that a perfectly free agent would choose to pass in this detestable climate."

Vidal remembered the dinners *given* in London during the spring-tide of the year, and answered by a look and a caressing of his chin by his left hand, that seemed to express doubt.

“Is it possible?” returned Sir William, replying to his grimace. “You must have lived a good deal abroad, I am quite sure.”

“Yes, Sir William, I have certainly lived a good deal abroad, and I am quite ready to acknowledge that there is in the ‘pure and serene air’ of Italy something that seems to communicate an influence to every thought and every sensation. Oh! yes, I have lived abroad, and know what it is to open my eyes upon orient light, instead of misty fog. Nevertheless, I am not prepared to testify to the utter abominability of London in the spring; nay, I will confess that I am rather inclined to doubt whether the post meridian hours from seven to ten, or, if you will, from eight to eleven, can at that season be passed to more advantage on any other spot of earth.”

“Ah! say you so, Mr. Vidal? Nay, then, my Lady Sarah, we must look to the buttery hatch, and give due notice to our Gallic artist that we have one among us who is not to be fed upon sirloins. And I flatter myself, *mon cher*, that before you have been with us a week, you will be ready to

acknowledge that it is not only during the spring, and in London, that a man may dine."

This was said with a most bland and most hospitable smile, and accompanied with a bow to Mr. Vidal, which said as much in the way of cordial invitation, as it was possible for a bow to say.

While this was passing between the gentlemen, Lady Sarah settled herself in a beautifully recumbent attitude on the couch, and resumed the studies which the entrance of Mr. Vidal had interrupted. Lady Sarah had but four occupations in the world, for eating must not be classed among the occupations of women. These four occupations were dressing, dancing, sleeping, and reading French novels. FLIRTING must not be named in addition to these, because it could no more be classed as a separate and distinct occupation, than breathing might be. She was always flirting, or making ready to flirt. When she slept, her dreams were of accents, attitudes, and accidents, all belonging to the state of being for which she was born. When she read, it was only to learn the speculations of others upon the subject, in order to vary and enrich her own.

Need it be said that in dressing she was faithful to the object for which she lived, or that she loved dancing solely as a means of showing that she had not lived in vain?

Lady Sarah was still a beautiful woman, or rather she had not yet lost any of the indications calculated to prove that she *had been* a beautiful woman. She had, indeed, some short ten years before been surpassingly lovely, and such hold had the pleasurable conviction of this taken upon her heart and intellect (such as they were), that no other thought or feeling ever did, or ever could come in contact with it for an hour—no, not for a moment.

As she never really did any harm to any body, she might perhaps be considered, and certainly did consider herself, as a very innocent woman. In her own judgment, indeed, she was a good deal more. She truly believed herself to be a perfect model of virtue, and though her life was passed in ceaseless endeavours to inspire passion, the being happily incapable of feeling it herself, gave her a superiority over the majority of her most intimate friends, of which she was justly proud.

If ladies must flirt through the whole course of

their living life, it is assuredly better that they should flirt in Lady Sarah Monkton's way, than any other; but the worst part of the business is the sort of *dying* life that follows, if these innocent assassins of the peace of mankind have not the good fortune to expire, like other pretty flowers, when their bloom is past.

It was almost impossible that any married couple could live in a state of greater harmony than did Sir William and Lady Sarah Monkton. Each seemed to have their allotted task, and neither ever interfered unpleasantly with the other. The enlarged sphere of Sir William embraced all that was in any way connected with general display. It was his to prove by all he said (which was a great deal), and by all he did (which was not much), that they were people of higher station, greater wealth, finer taste, more enlarged European connexion with people of fashion, and more general superiority in all ways, than any or every body else in the world. While her gentler feminine share in the business of life, was only to prove that Sir William in choosing her, had possessed himself of a treasure which no man could behold

without the most imminent danger of breaking the tenth commandment, which he sighed to think must be the case, while she felt that she owed it to herself, to her husband, and to society in general, not to neglect or suffer to fall into oblivion, those advantages which it had pleased Heaven to bestow upon her.

Mr. Vidal made his visit exactly long enough to leave an impression upon the knight and lady of the Vinc, that he would have lingered longer, had it been possible to do so with propriety. Nor did he depart till he had made an opportunity for giving one look to Lady Sarah, which convinced her that proper, or not proper, he would not have departed so soon, had he seen the least chance of renewing their *tête-à-tête*.

He put his horse into a brisk trot as soon as he had passed the gates. As long as he remained within sight of the house, he was, of course, occupied by admiring the fine trees, and so forth, but this over, he felt disposed to indulge himself by getting to the Town Head House as speedily as possible. He had begun the day well, and acted up to his principles, which, whenever a man does strictly,

he naturally feels contented with himself. Nor had he the drawback to his satisfaction which often arises from perceiving that the performance of a duty does not always promise immediate reward. Vidal felt quite sure that his call would answer. Not that he was unobservant of the fact that the grapes and Champagne were talked of, but not ordered; nor of another truth, equally evident to his acute eye, namely, that Lady Sarah was not young enough (by daylight) to justify his running into the slightest danger, by exceeding the precise degree of gallantry necessary to propitiate her cordial approbation of him as one of the most delightful men in the world.

He thought she *was* still worth this; and he thought, too, that Sir William and his house, and his possible dinners, were worth the hour and half he had given to obtain a chance of them; certain that, such as they were, they would be at his command, from the necessity under which he perceived the owner of the Vine to live, of being behindhand in nothing that could make him conspicuous as a man of taste. And where would his reputation for

taste speedily be, in the Compton neighbourhood, if he failed in hospitable attention to him? Theodore Vidal knew that he dared not fail in this, even if it should cost him more than one costly dinner-party, which, nevertheless, our keen observer suspected would not be particularly convenient to him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Town Head House was soon reached—for the Lord Randal's hackneys trotted well—and the somewhat anxious inquiry as to whether Miss Jenkins were at home, was answered in the affirmative.

“Can you forgive this early intrusion, my dear Miss Jenkins?” said Mr. Vidal, as he entered the upstairs sitting-room—the venerable drawing-room, opening upon the garden, being kept sacred to grand tea-drinking parties. “Can you forgive my so immediately availing myself of your permission to pay my respects to the family of my dear mother's oldest friend?”

As he said this, Mr. Vidal fixed his eyes steadily upon the oldest lady in the room, but not the less for that was he aware that it contained

two others, and that one of them was the matchless creature to whom he had, on the preceding evening, surrendered his heart. It required a good deal of that command of himself of which he was so justly proud, to enable him to hear Miss Elizabeth's profusely civil answer to an end, before he turned first to one side, and then to the other, in order to salute the other ladies. And then Miss Anne Jenkins was properly made known to him. And then they all sat down. And then was Theodore Vidal at length rewarded for the conscientious discharge of all the duties he had that morning performed, by finding himself at liberty to re-examine, by broad daylight, the exquisite face which had appeared so surpassingly lovely to him by the lamp light of the preceding evening.

And how did it bear the scrutiny? It was no inexperienced, or unfastidious eye, that now perused the features of Clara. Vidal was, in every sense of the word, a connoisseur in beauty, and so strongly persuaded had he been the night before that he never could again hope to see a face and form of such perfection, that he felt as if she were doomed, of necessity, to be his wife; because all that was

best among the gifts of Heaven, belonged of right to him, who, by his innate intensity of power and will, knew how to acquire all that was most prized by his fellow-men, whatever Fortune might seem to say to the contrary. "And my wife she shall be," was his last waking thought, as he turned himself on his pillow to sleep.

This determination, however, would most assuredly have been shaken, had the light of the sun treated her as roughly as it had done the elegant Lady Sarah. And there was no pink curtain over the wide bay window of the Town Head House, nothing to soften the bold garish eye of day, as it shot its bright rays athwart the room. Neither was there a couch to display a coquettish little foot, or the graceful length of limb to which it belonged. No lace and lilac meandered about her bust, no delicate structure of the same pretty material displayed, while seeming to conceal, the silken hair. Never, perhaps, was seen an attitude, or a dress of more genuine simplicity than those in which Clara Maynard now met the scrutinising eye of Theodore Vidal.

She was seated near the window, and employed

upon what was evidently a piece of useful plain-work, which being large enough to be supported by the table, sheltered, nay, perhaps nearly concealed, a little volume of Shakspeare, with which she was indulging herself by snatches, as she constructed the homely fabric before her into a garment for some poor body, who haply might have had to do without it, had Clara permitted herself to enjoy her *Coriolanus* more uninterruptedly.

As to the dress of Clara, it was almost as homely as her occupation, consisting of a darkish coloured cotton dress, with snow-white, but quite plain collar and cuffs. Her dark brown hair, indeed, was very smoothly brushed, but it was parted on her forehead, and all closely gathered together in one knot at the back of her head.

Vidal looked at her, and felt that the trial was a severe one. He was not a man to be insensible to the seductive charm of a well-fancied toilet; nor did he ever feel inclined to quarrel with a woman for looking handsomer than she was. He liked to be lapped in Elysium, and every attempt to enchant him brought a charm with it, provided always that

the fair one who aimed at the glorious enterprise was not positively disqualified for it by want of beauty.

Miss Elizabeth Jenkins received the civil speech he made her on entering with so very long a speech in return, that Clara, who had looked up, and slightly bowed, when he came in, dropped her eyes again, and was continuing her work before he was at liberty to look at her. And what was the first effect that her succinct figure, and notable occupation, produced on him? Was it unmixed admiration?

No, it was not.

His first thought, as he thus beheld her, was to institute a comparison between the picture she thus presented to his eyes, and that which had been prepared for him in the little drawing-room at the Vine.

Had the mind and the taste of Vidal been quite unsophisticated, the comparison never would have suggested itself, accompanied with any shadow of doubt as to which object was the most fascinating. But he loved to indulge himself in fastidious niceties, for the pleasure of believing that his taste,

and his very nature and senses were more refined than those of ordinary men, and he rather encouraged than checked the thought, that even Clara herself, with all the glory of her young beauty around her, ought not to have risked the meeting his eye so carelessly.

And how long did the delusion last? How long did he continue to fancy that it signified what dress, or what occupation was assumed by such a being as Clara?

Only till she again raised her eyes, and turning her charming head a little towards him, permitted him again to see the perfect contour of her lovely face.

“Oh! fool, fool, fool!” he inwardly murmured, as he suffered his eyes to rest upon her. “It is Nature’s own hand that has bedecked her! What other graces does she need as handmaids?”

Seldom, perhaps, in the whole course of his very excitable existence, had he run so great a risk of suffering the genuine intensity of his feelings to interfere with his power of expressing them, as at that moment. He felt as if he wished to indulge himself in the pleasure of looking at her without

being interrupted even by the sound of his own voice, and for one delicious moment he yielded to the temptation—and what features, what a countenance it was that he thus gazed upon! Such perfection of outline, such freshness of youthful bloom, blended with such an air of awakened thought, he had never looked at before.

Whether it really was that the intellectuality of Vidal made this last named charm peculiarly interesting, or that on so young a face it was so uncommon as to attract particular attention, might be doubtful; but as his eyes studied every speaking lineament, it was the beautiful and not-to-be-mistaken expression of intelligence which seemed to enter most deeply into his soul.

“Oh! she is made for me!” thought he, with equal sincerity, and rapture. How impossible would it be for any mere loveliness of form to enchain *me* for life! There is not a Houri in Paradise that could do it. But thou, Clara! With that sweet, thoughtful brow, that small, but firmly-outlined chin, those eyes of light, and poetry, and love, shall I not gaze upon them, till they fade away, as even I myself must fade, and then shall we not sleep,

and, it may be, dream together of love immortal?"

But though all this really did pass distinctly through the brain of Mr. Vidal, it came, and it went so rapidly, that he had only the air, for one short moment, of being rather absent; and then he aroused himself, as it were, for the delightful work that lay before him.

He was about to enter upon one of the most delicious periods of human existence. Animated, warmed, inspired, by a new-born feeling of impassioned love, conscious of powers that must insure an answering love—placed, for he knew not how long, amidst a circle of admiring friends, who, while they beckoned him from house to house, would be sure, as he answered each kind successive signal, to invent new plans, new pleasures, new social meetings of the neighbourhood, at all of which he should bask in the gentle warmth of her sweet eyes, and draw her nearer and nearer still to his fond heart!

There is one fact, however, that must be here stated, both for the sake of truth and probability, and yet whoever argues from this fact, that the

new-born passion of Mr. Vidal for Clara Maynard was not genuine, will blunder greatly, and argue falsely.

It may be remembered that when Vidal, on the preceding evening, was engaged, according to his wont on entering among a set of new people, in propitiating the hospitable feelings of them all in succession, he had bestowed some few moments upon a gentleman of the party, called Norman. Before doing so, his watchful acuteness had discovered that whatever might be the quality of this person's head, the master key that would most readily open it, must be hewn from the solid rock. And accordingly he very properly addressed him with a fossil in his hand, and Lyell, if not lies, upon his tongue. But having made by this means a very satisfactory entry into the affections of his new acquaintance, he ventured, for a moment, to vary the subject of their discourse, by saying with a quiet smile, as he still handled the fossil which had introduced them to each other—

“And talking of specimens, you have one there,” sending a glance of his Asiatic-looking eye towards Clara, “that ought not quite to be overlooked were

we in a quarry of fossils. Who is that very lovely girl sitting on the ottoman?"

"She is a very lovely girl," replied the old gentleman, in an accent of very cordial assent. "Her name is Maynard. Miss Clara Maynard."

"Is she the growth of this soil?" demanded Vidal.

"Not exactly," was the reply. "But she was early transplanted to it. She is the niece of two single ladies of good family, who reside here in an old paternal mansion that is interesting from its unspoiled antiquity."

"Is the fair Clara the only scion of the ancient house?—or are there any more such pretty creatures to be seen there?" inquired Vidal.

"No, there are no more of them," replied Mr. Norman, smiling, "and upon my word, I think one such is enough to turn the head of any young gentleman not very decidedly pre-occupied."

"I think so too," said Vidal. "But before I make proposals," he added, laughing, "I must inquire if the ancient mansion is to be her own? That will be but common prudence, you know, sir."

"Oh! dear yes. I believe I can answer for it that the old mansion and every thing else possessed

by her worthy aunts, will be all her own. But do you not think that this fossil shows, &c., &c., &c."

That the love of Mr. Vidal for Miss Maynard was a genuine and real passion is certain. But whether it would so speedily have led him to decide upon proposing to her, if he had not learned these particulars, may perhaps be doubted.

CHAPTER VIII.

AND now commenced, as we have said, most delicious period in the life of Theod He was perfectly aware of it. No doubt ing his own wishes or intentions har spirits, nor, it must be confessed, did serious fears as to his success disturb He felt certain, that had Clara been eng Norman would have hinted the fact du friendly chit-chat the evening before—nor even had he felt less sure of this, have greatly disturbed. He knew that ladies mi to forget promises, and to break vows w

face of Clara. And then he roused himself, and set to work.

"What a delicious room this is, Miss Jenkins!" he exclaimed, getting up, and looking out of the old-fashioned bay-window.

"Indeed, sir, I am glad you like it," replied Miss Jenkins, "for I am quite sure you are a judge of rooms. And I confess this one is a great favourite of mine. We have several more sitting-rooms, because it is rather a large house; but my dear mother, Lady Arabella, always sat in this room in the morning, in preference to any other."

"I cannot help thinking," said Vidal, musingly, "that I have heard my mother describe this room, and that beautiful piece of fine turf, and the mulberry-tree, and all."

"You don't say so?" returned Miss Jenkins, looking much gratified. "Anne!" she said, turning to her sister, "Mr. Vidal's mother was an intimate friend of our dear mother, Lady Arabella. Only think of that! Is it not singular?"

"Very singular indeed," replied Miss Anne, looking as much pleased as Miss Elizabeth, "and in what part of the neighbourhood, sir, was your

mother residing at the time when you think she must have known this room?"

"No—not residing—my mother was never residing in this neighbourhood," replied Mr. Vidal. "If I am right in thinking that I have really heard her describe this room, she must have seen it when she was making her wedding tour with my poor dear father. Intimate as was their friendship, the Lady Arabella was considerably my mother's senior, and it was during the season of my mother's being presented at court, that Lady Arabella Jenkins became so fond of her, that in London her ladyship's house was my mother's second home. But no part of the Vidal family ever resided in this county. Therefore, you see, Miss Jenkins, that it must have been during her wedding tour that my mother became acquainted with this charming room."

"Dear me! How interesting!" cried Miss Anne Jenkins.

"It is indeed!" said Miss Elizabeth, adding, almost affectionately, "it is a great pleasure, sir, I assure you, for us to see a descendant of any one who was intimate with our dear mother, Lady Ara-

bella, and I do hope, that before you leave the neighbourhood, which I trust you will be in no hurry to do, I say, sir, that I do trust that you will spare us an evening. We shall be delighted to make a little party on purpose, and then you would see our principal drawing-room, which is furnished with green and gold, just as it was in the lifetime of our dear mother, Lady Arabella, and I think it as good as certain, that your mother must have seen that room too. Don't you think so, Anne."

"I have no doubt in the world of it, sister," replied Miss Anne. "In fact nobody *can* have any doubt of it; for though it is a good many years ago that she died, there are many people who remember her perfectly well, for of course, sir, what Lady Arabella did, was not likely to be forgotten in the neighbourhood, and over and over again, I have heard it said, that Lady Arabella Jenkins always opened the great drawing-room, when she had staying company."

"You may depend upon it, my dear ladies," replied Mr. Vidal, in the most agreeable tone in which it was possible for a young man to address two elderly ladies at once, "you may depend upon

it, that I feel as great a desire to see the room in which it is so more than likely that your noble mother received my ever-lamented parent, as you can be to show it to me. The kind invitation you promise, my dear Miss Jenkins, will be looked forward to with hope, and accepted with delight."

And having said this, and looked every thing that it was his wish and intention to look at the same time, he thought he might venture to leave the elder ladies to themselves for a little while, and enter into conversation with the younger.

Several books, of various sorts and sizes, lay upon the old-fashioned little carved table at which Clara was seated with her work. Vidal knew that the suddenly looking at a picture, or the suddenly opening a book, might serve to excuse the commencement of any conversation, however abrupt. He accordingly, after first dropping as if accidentally from his standing position at the window into a chair immediately opposite to that of Clara at the little work-table, opened the volume which lay nearest to his hand, and read its title. "Hero Worship."

"Ah! are you at that, Miss Maynard?" said he,

looking at her with a quietly critical air, well calculated to pique her curiosity as to what it might mean. "Hero Worship! This is no food for babes and sucklings."

"I quite agree with you there," replied Clara, smiling, "nor did I open the book till I had passed my nineteenth birthday."

"And how long has Miss Maynard passed her nineteenth birthday?" said he, addressing her aunts with a sort of droll demureness which very well masked whatever there might be of impertinence in so direct a question.

"Just three months, Mr. Vidal," replied Miss Anne, laughing at the comic tone in which the question was asked, and little guessing the regret which lay under it, that the fair creature he meant to appropriate was not seventeen instead.

"And what other studies, fair lady, have you entered upon since you attained this advanced age" he resumed.

"If I had studied that one as much it deserves," she replied, "it would have lasted me more than three months."

"Which means, I presume," said he, "that you

as if he wished to ascertain by accurate observation what sort of person she really was; and then, as when he had criticised the homely plainness of her attire, his thoughts, his judgment, his feelings took a sudden turn, and he became convinced that both in face and form she would be lovelier than even she was now, when a few more ; strengthened the look of divine intelligence might already be caught in the soft lines of her youthful face.

“ She is made for me, she is made for me,” was again his secret thought. He threw not one-thousandth part as much love into his eyes as he looked at her as he had thought to bestow on Lady Sarah. On the contrary, he continued to make the comparison.

it, "tell me why it is that you have given this singular volume less attention than you think it deserves? Had you told me that you did not like it, that it bored and wearied you, I should have understood you perfectly, and probably I should have thought it the most natural thing in the world. But as it is, I am puzzled. Do explain this to me."

"Should you have thought it the most natural thing in the world?" said Clara, questioning in her turn, instead of replying to him.

"Yes, I think so," said he, again giving her an earnest and examining look. "I think so, but I am not quite sure."

"You are not quite sure," returned Clara, laughing, "whether you think Carlyle's 'Hero Worship' is wearying and a bore, or not?"

"I did not say that," he replied, with quickness; "do you think I did?"

"Why, no," she returned, colouring; "I believe I understood you better. I believe you only meant to express a doubt whether I was capable of liking it."

"Yes," he replied, very quietly, "that is what I meant to express."

Clara was half angry, but she was more than half amused by this unusual bluntness.

“I doubt,” thought she, “if the admiration so frankly expressed by the ladies when we left the dining-room yesterday, will long endure if he expresses his contempt for them with the same unshrinking sincerity he does to me.”

And then, as he did not speak again, she did, for she rather wished to hear what rude thing he would say next; so pushing with her thimble finger another book towards him, she said,

“There, Mr. Vidal, there is another volume into which I have ventured to look, presumptuous as it was to do so. Do you feel the same suspicion that it was likely to bore me?”

He opened the book thus offered him and again read the title aloud. “‘Philip von Artevelde!’ Do I suspect that it has bored you, Miss Maynard? That is the question—*your* question, observe, not mine. There are charming lines in it,

‘She was so fair, that in the angelic choir
She will not need put on another shape
Than that she wore on earth.’

That is a pretty thought, is it not?” And having

read these lines aloud, he closed the book, and once more fixed his curiously scrutinising glance upon her.

Clara caught the glance, or rather the steady gaze that was thus boldly fixed upon her face, and certainly would have felt offended by it, had it not been for the expression of cynical doubt, and philosophical examination which he contrived to mix with his at least equally evident admiration. She did not know what to make of him, and this state of mind, which was precisely that into which it was his purpose to plunge her, not only prevented her from being seriously angry at the earnestness of the look he had so repeatedly fixed upon her, but made her feel that Mr. Vidal, though a very agreeable man, was certainly disposed to entertain a somewhat contemptuous idea of women.

There was a quiet consciousness at her heart that all women did not deserve this, and she was sorry that such a man as Vidal should think it. Slightly bending her head in acquiescence of the admiration he had expressed for the passage he had read, she resumed her work in silence.

Her two aunts, who were both captivated by the elegant figure and friendly manner of the offspring

of the Lady Arabella's old friend, secretly blamed Clara, and severely too, for the little notice she seemed to be taking of him, and in order to atone for it, they both addressed him at once with the same inquiry. "Did he not think that the country round Compton was very pretty?"

"Indeed I do," was the reply, "so pretty that I do not think I shall be satisfied by a cursory visit to it. I should not wonder if I were tempted to ramble about here for weeks."

He had turned away from Clara's little work-table when thus addressed, but resumed his position at it as he answered.

"Dear me! I am exceedingly glad to hear it!" cried Miss Jenkins. "I am sure, sir, it will be a great compliment to the neighbourhood—and you will find a great many very, very pleasant families here, I assure you."

"Yes—I think there seem to be some very nice people here," he replied, "and without that, you know, my dear Miss Jenkins, the most beautiful country in the world would be a desert. Don't you think so?"

"I am sure I do," said Miss Anne, with great earnestness.

And "Oh, dear!—certainly—to be sure," said her elder sister, with almost equal unction.

"As for myself, I must confess," rejoined Vidal, "that although I greatly admire fine scenery, I am not of a nature sufficiently sublime to say to the rocks and trees, be ye my friends! By the way," he added, "I do think that I am most exceedingly fortunate in having met with the family of Lady Arabella Jenkins! My poor dear mother! Cannot you imagine," he continued, suddenly turning with an air of the most friendly intimacy to Miss Elizabeth, and leaning forward in his chair that he might approach her, "cannot you fancy what a difference it must make to a man who has got into a new neighbourhood as suddenly as if he had tumbled from the moon, cannot you fancy the pleasure of finding himself in the midst of hereditary old friends? Don't you think it is a piece of very remarkable good luck, Miss Maynard?"

In reply to this, he received from the two elder ladies an almost affectionate assurance that they sympathised in his feelings. And from Clara, upon whose table he was again leaning, a look, half re-

proachful and half amused, acknowledging that she understood, as he intended she should do, both the nature and motive of his recollections on the subject of her long defunct grandmother.

Miss Maynard was not a young lady at all likely to approve an impertinent pleasantry played off upon her aunts. But, nevertheless, she was glad to find that it was only a pleasantry. It would have been a great deal more detestable had he invented such a rigmarol with any serious purpose of deceiving them. She was quite aware of the absurdly frequent recurrence of her grandmother's noble name in their discourse, and was more inclined, perhaps, to lament their folly, than greatly to resent his quick perception of it.

That there was a tolerable good chance that Clara would so receive it, he foresaw; but he foresaw, likewise, that he should at any rate establish a sort of confidential understanding with her, which, however angry she might feel, or feign to be, at the cause of it, could not fail to produce as great a feeling of intimacy with her, as the mention of their time-honoured parent had done with her aunts. But might she not betray him? Vidal

did not think this likely. There was something so base in betraying a merry secret of that sort.

The conversation went on with animation on the part of Mr. Vidal, and very admiring civility on that of the Miss Jenkinases. What Clara might think about it, was not quite so obvious, for she continued her work without intermission, though she was obliged occasionally to look up from it to answer some question or remark, especially addressed to her; and in this manner more than an hour wore away very rapidly.

At length, however, Mr. Vidal rose, and looked perhaps as handsome as it was possible for him to do, as he extended his hand in farewell to Miss Elizabeth. His complexion, which was usually rather sallow, was animated by a flush, and his eyes were lighted up, too, by the interest with which the conversation, desultory as it was, had inspired him. No man knew better how to show off a good person by an easy attitude, than he did, and as he now stood, he really might have made an excellent study for either painter or sculptor.

He next shook hands with Miss Anne, and replied to the very sincere hopes of seeing him again,

expressed by both sisters, with a graceful cordiality that was quite perfect.

He then approached the little work-table, and seemed prepared to make his farewell bow there also; but just as he was about to do so, his eye caught sight of the volume of Shakspeare which was enveloped, and very nearly concealed, amidst the folds of the substantial piece of work upon which Clara was employed. He immediately stopped short in his leave-taking, and daintily insinuating his little finger between these folds, much in the timid manner of one playing at the game of spillikins, he contrived to draw forth the volume without at all deranging the position of her work.

Clara blushed. There was assuredly no reason in the world why she should have been ashamed of the source from which she had been secretly deriving amusement before the arrival of Mr. Vidal—excepting, perhaps, that it *had* been secret.

Her aunts were, both of them, very good women in their way, the elder, perhaps, a little too hard, and the younger a little too soft by nature; but both were, in the main, exceedingly kind to Clara, and very fond of her. Nevertheless, her position

in the old manor-house was not one of perfect freedom. She was, however, too good, and too right-thinking a girl, to give many opportunities for fault-finding, or authoritative interference of any kind, except in some particular points of ceremonial observances in the drawing-room. By far the most important of these, and by far the most insisted upon, was the abstaining from reading in the presence of company—which word *company* comprehended, in this instance, the whole human race, with the exception of servants, who of course came and went, without its being necessary for a young lady to be conscious of their being present at all.

The inconvenience—it would hardly be too strong to say *the real suffering*—produced to Clara Maynard by this, was so great, that after the dismissal of the governess, who had been her companion and instructress from childhood, she made repeated efforts to break through it—but in vain. “If you want to go on with your studies, my dear,” Miss Elizabeth was wont to say, whenever these symptoms of rebellion appeared, “had you not better return to the school-room for the purpose? It is not lady-like, Clara, to read in company.”

But if, in obedience to this remonstrance, the young student left the room, and established herself, nothing loath, either in her own room, or in that which had been heretofore appropriated to her and her governess, she was sure to be addressed, on returning to the drawing-room, with a half fretful, half affectionate remonstrance from her Aunt Anne upon the length of her absence. "It does seem so hard," she would say, "after bringing you up, as we have done, so exactly as if you had been our own child, to see you run away, as soon as you are grown into a woman, to sit by your own self, instead of cheering your Aunt Elizabeth and me with your dear company."

As all this was of daily occurrence, and as there was no symptom whatever of this really cruel restraint being relaxed, Clara began to think it was her duty to submit to it, and got into a habit of imbibing the mental nourishment, without which she could not exist, during hours stolen from sleep, both night and morning. Yet still the many intervening hours of drawing-room needle-work passed heavily for her; and though she had ceased to combat the law, she often contrived to evade it.

Sometimes a basket of Berlin wool, being placed before her, served as a covert for the volume she was reading; and sometimes, as upon the present occasion, she contrived to make her more useful needle-work serve the same purpose.

The book now drawn forth from its ambush by Mr. Vidal, was not closed, but open; a small ivory book-stretcher, long ago given to her by Arthur Lexington, being in constant use, and, in truth, absolutely necessary for this peculiarly feminine method of study. From the volume thus pinned open, and thus concealed, Vidal raised his intelligent eyes to her face. Those eyes had not more clearly discerned the book itself, than the manner, and motive of its present use; nor could Clara meet the look they gave her, accompanied as it was by a slight furtive smile, without being aware that he had found her out. He had caught the running title at the top of the page, and instantly, and very skilfully managed to conceal it again among the folds of Betty Wright's garment without its having met any eyes but his own.

Here, then, was a second secret between them, of as light and playful a nature as the first—but still it was a secret; and Clara blushed, and Vidal smiled. And

Vidal knew why Clara blushed, and Clara knew why Vidal smiled. But nobody else in the whole world knew any thing about it, nor was there the very slightest chance that any body in the whole world ever should know any thing about it, and therefore it was a positive fact that they had secrets between them, though they had only seen each other twice. Clara thought she did not quite like it; however, she thought also that it did not signify at all, for that it could not be of any consequence. And then she confessed to herself, that she thought Mr. Vidal the very oddest man she had ever seen, but she confessed to herself also that he was very amusing; but that was of no consequence either, only Betty Wright's garment went on the faster for it, for she did not read any more of Coriolanus just then.

Clara did not know how greatly the community of a secret of any kind increases intimacy, but Mr. Vidal did.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR at least half-an-hour after Mr. Vidal left them, the two Miss Jenkinses continued to make him the theme of their discourse, and the object of unmitigated praise and admiration. They did not either of them remember to have seen a young man, certainly still quite a young man, as he was, who could bear any comparison with him in agreeableness. To be sure, they had seen Mr. Arthur Lexington exceedingly agreeable, when he happened to be in good spirits, but not equal to Mr. Vidal at any time. Besides, Arthur Lexington must be a great deal older than Mr. Vidal, and it was so particularly scarce a thing to see *quite* a young man so very agreeable; to which Miss Anne added, with a little sigh, that of course they all knew well enough that

there were men that nobody could call *quite* young, who were certainly more agreeable than any body else could be; but, notwithstanding this clause, and the almost total silence of Clara into the bargain, Mr. Vidal might have been extremely well satisfied had he heard every word that followed his retreat—a piece of good fortune which does not always betide morning visitors, when their visits have been as long as that of Mr. Vidal.

Most assuredly, the two Miss Jenkinse *were* very much pleased by the appearance, manner, and conversation of Mr. Vidal, but they might not have been in so open-hearted, gay, and demonstrative a frame of mind, had not the pleasant adventure of the preceding evening been fresh in the memory of both.

Miss Elizabeth's triumph was something, the ten pounds she had won, considerably more; but the fact that Mr. Clementson was about to bring out his daughter, and open his house to the neighbourhood, infinitely transcended both. In short, they were both of them in excellent spirits, and excellent temper, and though they had just succeeded in persuading Clara to promise that she would lay aside her work, and go

with them to make a call upon the apothecary's wife, who lived at the most distant point of the town of Compton; they, nevertheless, gave a smiling reception to Mr. Arthur Lexington, who entered the room at the very moment they were all going to quit it.

It was not now very often that Arthur Lexington made a morning visit at the Town Head House, for, to his honour be it spoken, he no sooner became convinced, that there was no pleasure in his life which he loved so well as a visit to that old-fashioned mansion, than he steadfastly resolved to go there no more in the same easy, uninvited style as formerly; and he had kept his resolution so well, that having first very nearly destroyed the happiness, and the health, of the fair creature for whose welfare he so resolutely sacrificed his own, he had, at length, so well succeeded in his efforts to convince her that he loved her not with a love sufficiently strong to make him seek her as his wife, that she had schooled herself into believing that she no longer loved him. Nevertheless, she never saw him enter without some slight feeling of agitation; but now it never lasted long enough to affect the tone of her voice, as she returned his tranquil salutation.

He had now come, after an absence not quite so long as usual, to inquire if the ladies had finished the perusal of a review, with which he always supplied them, and which he now wanted, for some purpose or other, before the usual time of its return to him.

The book was in Clara's room, and she immediately ran off to fetch it. By the time she returned, she found both her aunts examining and cross-examining Mr. Lexington as to all he knew about that delightful Mr. Vidal, and whether he did not think him the most elegant, gentlemanlike, and agreeable man he had ever seen.

In reply to their anxious inquiries as to what he knew of Mr. Vidal, he had no information to give. He had never heard his name before, nor did he believe that Lord Randal knew any thing about him. But Lord Randal did sometimes bring down people that he knew very little about. It was an Irish peculiarity, he believed.

"Well, but Mr. Lexington," said Miss Jenkins, "you must allow that this time, at least, we are all very much obliged to him ; don't you think he is most particularly agreeable ?"

"Upon my word, Miss Jenkins," he replied, "I

know so little about him, that I do not feel capable of giving an opinion. I believe he spoke less to me than to any of the party yesterday; I doubt if I exchanged a single word with him."

"Well! but that does not prevent your being able to judge whether he is agreeable or not," persisted Miss Jenkins. "You must have heard him talk, if he did not talk to you. You must have been able to judge whether he is gentlemanlike or not."

"Upon my word," again replied Mr. Lexington, laughing, "I cannot venture to go as far as that; the very most I could do in that way is to say, whether I thought him gentlemanlike myself."

"Well, Mr. Lexington, and of course that is all I mean to ask; never mind what other people may think, what is your own opinion?"

Arthur Lexington looked at Clara, for he saw that she had raised her eyes to look at him; and he saw, too, that her colour was heightened, and that she was evidently anxious to hear what he was going to reply to this close questioning.

Arthur Lexington had behaved very nobly, very generously, in the conduct he had pursued towards Clara; for he had sometimes thought that, had cir-

cumstances permitted him to ask for her love, it would not have been refused to him, and the not asking for it was very noble, very generous—for her love would have been more precious to him, ten thousand times told, than any other earthly blessing which could have been bestowed upon him. But although he had sacrificed every hope of happiness for himself, in order to guard her from the possible miseries which might arise from a small income, he felt not at this moment any such superfluous fund of generosity within him, as would lead to falsify the opinion he had formed of Mr. Vidal, whether right or wrong, in order to gratify the partiality he was quite sure she had conceived for him, and in short, to smooth the way for the addresses of a presumptuous stranger, whose sudden admiration of Clara was still more evident than her flattering approval of him.

“What is my own opinion?” he repeated; “do you positively insist upon my giving it, Miss Jenkins?”

“Yes, I do, indeed, Mr. Lexington,” she replied; “it is not fair that when old and intimate friends like we are, meet together, that every thing should

be spoken freely on one side, and nothing at all on the other."

"You are quite right," he replied, gravely, "you have a right to my opinion, my dear Miss Elizabeth, whenever you are kind enough to take the trouble of asking for it ; I do *not* admire this Mr. Vidal, Miss Jenkins, there is something in his countenance, and occasionally in his manner also, which I think peculiarly disagreeable."

All the three ladies had their eyes fixed upon him, but as soon as he had ceased speaking, the two sisters looked at each other, and their niece looked at the carpet.

"Disagreeable ?" repeated the elder sister, in a tone which plainly expressed, in addition, "is it possible any one can think so ?"

"Disagreeable !" echoed the younger ; and her tone, as expressive as that of the elder, evidently implied that the opinion thus uttered by Mr. Lexington was one of the most monstrous ever pronounced by man.

"I am sorry to disagree with you so entirely, as it is evident I do," said the gentleman, "but you must remember, that your demand for my opinion

was too peremptory to permit of my refusing to give it, though aware how widely it differed from your own. But it is hardly fair, is it, Miss Maynard, that you should thus hear us all thus open our hearts so frankly, yet keep your own ideas of the subject under discussion, wrapped up in the secret and sacred repository of your own bosom ? May I not, as I have spoken so very freely myself, ask you to tell us with equal unreserve, 'what your opinion of this stranger is ?' "

There was certainly something slightly approaching to a sneer, in the look and voice of Lexington as he said this, and if he really wished to learn Clara's opinion of Mr. Vidal, he could have taken no surer method of giving her courage to speak it.

"I might fairly begin my discourse upon Mr. Vidal," she replied, "as you did yours ; I might fairly say, that I know so little about him, that I do not feel capable of giving an opinion ; nevertheless, that you may not again reproach me with undue reserve, I will candidly confess, that I differ from you altogether, and that I think him extremely agreeable."

"I am in the glorious minority of one," said Lexington, rising, "and as I do not think there is any chance of my bringing any of you, ladies, to

my opinion, or of your converting me to yours, I will cut short the discussion by taking my leave. Miss Maynard, if you wish to have this review back again, I can let you have it to-morrow morning."

"No, thank you," she replied, "I have quite done with it."

He bowed, and was out of the room in a moment.

"She has quite done with it, and she has quite done with me," he muttered, bitterly, as he left the house; "oh! what an idiot must that man be who anchors his affections and his hopes for life upon a woman!—frail, weak, unstable, they know not what they like, nor what they approve. But it is flying in the face of Heaven to complain of this; they are formed thus, it is their nature, and they cannot change it, if they would. Thank Heaven! that this girl, whom I thought so perfect, so beautifully true, as well—alas!—as so truly beautiful; thank Heaven! that she has let me look into her inmost heart, and see how little there is there worth—worth all the ceaseless and unchanging love that would, and must have been hers, through life, had she proved all I thought her."

A more utterly unjust and unwarrantable tirade

than this, was never thought or spoken. However, let us give Mr. Lexington, who, notwithstanding this flagrant injustice, had really some very good qualities; let us give him the benefit of his own reasoning, let us acquit him of wilful injustice. He could not have helped it if he would !

CHAPTER X.

THE hospitality of the Compton neighbourhood was a rich soil for so skilful a labourer as Theodore Vidal to enter upon. He had sown good seed during the first hours of his introduction to it, and it speedily brought forth fruit accordingly.

Sir William Monkton and the dowager Mrs. General Springfield gave dinner-parties; the Miss Jenkinsons a very select, but splendid tea-drinking; and Mr. Norman, a breakfast, which was rendered respectably scientific by a walk along a dry water-course in which fossils had occasionally been found of sufficient interest to justify even an unsuccessful attempt to find more.

Of course after each of these entertainments there was a morning call to be made, and upon these oc-

casions it was the custom of the country to sit down very sociably to a two o'clock luncheon; after which, there was always something very particularly beautiful, or interesting, to be seen in the gardens, or the hot-houses, or the library, or the home pastures; and in this manner the morning calls led to more intimacy than a dozen additional dinner-parties could have done without their assistance.

A fortnight of such goings on might have sufficed to make most young men feel intimate in the houses thus visited; what then might not be expected from it for Vidal?

It may be safely asserted, that during that time not a single day passed without affording him an opportunity of displaying some new and brilliant talent to the neighbourhood. On one occasion, Lady Randal arranged a troop of charade players, in which amusement the Springfields were known to excel, and for which Mr. Chatterton Springfield, in particular, proposed that his new friend, Vidal, should be invited to give his assistance; and from the moment he appeared, almost before he had uttered a single syllable of the rich and racy playfulness by which, apparently without the slightest

effort, he elicited the talents of the ladies, while, unconsciously, as it seemed, displaying his own, no other gentleman of the set appeared to be either seen or heard. And yet so masterly was the tact with which he managed to avoid losing ground, even with those he eclipsed, that he contrived to make Mr. Chatterton Springfield, and his admiring mother too, believe that his having thus joined the party, was the greatest advantage to him possible, and that he had never played so well before in all his life, for that, in fact, Vidal and he acted like flint and steel to each other.

At Lady Sarah's first party, it became evident to every body that such waltzing as Mr. Vidal's was very rarely seen in any country; and at Miss Jenkinses, his extempore compositions, accompanied on the pianoforte by himself, left all who were happy enough to hear him, divided between wonder and delight.

But it would be vain to attempt following this extraordinary young man through the display of all his multifarious talents. That he was a very clever person is quite certain, and equally so that he was at this time under the influence of a species of in-

spiration which in those cases when it leads to the display of talent, is sure to make the inspired one outdo himself.

It was very soon an understood thing in the neighbourhood, though not positively fixed, that when Mr. Vidal's visit to the Randals was over, he was to take up his quarters at Monkton Vine.

Mr. Norman had told him that if he could, among all his various engagements, find time for a geological ramble through the district, hammer in hand and sack on shoulder, a room at his house should be kept at his command, to be inhabited or not, just as might suit him best; and upon hearing that Fairy Ring (the beautiful residence of his geological conquest), as well as the snug income which sustained its unostentatious but very liberal hospitality, had no presumptive heir yet named for it, he had serious thoughts of accepting the offer before he settled the exact time for his marriage with the lovely Clara.

All this brilliant success was exceedingly enjoyed by Vidal; for though in a neighbourhood remote from all metropolitan splendour, there were not wanting materials for what rendered such splendour en-

chanting. He had found beauty, talent, and high appreciation of himself, joined to good dinners, good waltzing, and large, well-lighted rooms; which advantages, joined to the fact that he had nothing to pay for them, rendered this period decidedly one of the happiest of his life.

There was another circumstance, too, which greatly contributed to render his enjoyment complete, which was, that Mr. Arthur Lexington kept as much as possible out of his way. This circumstance indeed, contributed considerably more to his continued and increasing success, than he would himself have been at all ready to suspect, or willing to believe. But, nevertheless, it is more than probable, that had the quiet, thoughtful, melancholy eye of Arthur Lexington, well guarded as it always was when directed towards poor Clara; had this expressive eye been upon her, she would not have been able, notwithstanding her hopeless disappointment, to have received the attentions of Theodore Vidal, as she did.

But when the affections of a woman have been deeply wounded, every thing like attachment and devotion has a charm. When the vanity and the tenderness of a young girl have been crushed toge-

ther, and extinguished, every thing like admiration is soothing, and in this case it was certainly the more so, because the accomplished stranger who had so speedily, so passionately, and so decisively declared his admiration of her, was himself so greatly admired by all her acquaintance.

Far, therefore, from having any sentiment to combat, before yielding her heart to that which Mr. Vidal was so well calculated to inspire, Clara welcomed the new emotions, made up of gratitude and admiration, which she felt growing upon her. His striking appearance, easy manners, and amusing conversation, had attracted her attention, to say the least of it, at Lord Randal's. His visit of the following morning at the Town Head House had rapidly advanced the acquaintance between them, while his manner towards her, in piquing her curiosity, awakened a sort of interest extremely favourable to his success.

Poor Lexington, meantime, continued to keep aloof. He had long ago told himself that the being too poor to marry was not the only or the worst calamity that attached to him. He felt quite certain, that sooner or later Clara would win the affec-

tion of some wealthier man, and that he should have to endure the misery of seeing her married to another. But though this last, worst, finishing misery of seeing her married had not yet arrived, he was already so infinitely more wretched than he had expected, under the infliction of seeing her receiving the homage of another, that he dared not trust himself to watch it, and under one pretence or another he contrived to evade pretty nearly all the gay doings which were going on.

Vidal, meanwhile, not only continued to make love to Clara, but persevered in his efforts to make himself the chosen and most particular friend of every house in the neighbourhood, and there was not, perhaps, a single individual of the set, either male or female, to whom he had not at some moment or other hinted that she, or he, as it might be, was in truth the great charm of the whole circle.

Chatterton Springfield became speedily aware that Vidal knew how to understand him better than any man he had ever known.

Lord Randal was ready to declare that there was not only an almost miraculous monopoly of talent in his new acquaintance, but, what was better still,

an affectionate sort of devotion and gratitude towards those who were kind to him, that it was very rare to meet.

Sir William pitied the poor fellow for not being able to get off with the Randals, and remain constantly with him and Lady Sarah. "It was so evident that he did not really care for any body else."

Good Mr. Norman, though he felt a little surprised at it, could not help thinking something of the same kind about himself.

And as to the ladies, there positively was not one, excepting, perhaps, Mrs. Dowager General Springfield, and the elder Miss Jenkins, who did not in their hearts believe, that if circumstances had rendered such a thing possible, Theodore Vidal would have preferred HER to all the other women in existence. And even in respect to the two decidedly old ladies above excepted, they also had each a little theory of her own, and secretly acknowledged that it *was* a pity to find a man thus peculiarly alive to their best qualities (which, alas! had been often overlooked), so very much their junior!

It must not, however, be supposed from what has been here said respecting Mr. Vidal's propensity to

make love to all the world, that he was incapable of real passion. Quite the reverse.

Theodore Vidal was a man of strong feelings, and of very considerable powers of mind; not of the very highest order, perhaps, yet he was decidedly something more than a man of mere talent. In fact, he was, beyond contradiction, a *thinking* man. Whether his data were always quite correct, or his inferences always just, is another matter; but he was a thinking man, and for the most part his thoughts had been directed to the great and important mystery of human life. How best to do battle with the evils incident to our nature and condition, and how most to enjoy the pleasures within our reach, had ever been the favourite theme of his meditations. Nor had he, as he thought, studied the subject in vain, and deep in his heart did he laugh at the blunders he saw made around him.

Of all the employments of intellect, that which appeared to him as decidedly the most futile, was the attempt at looking, as he called it, at things he could not see. Sceptical upon every species of evidence which did not come fully within the power of his finite intellect to examine (to a degree which

produced a really morbid condition of mind on this point) he held at bay, and pretty nearly with equal dislike, every species of religious opinion. But that he did so was a secret known to no man. Either from cunning, or from cowardice, he avoided all reference to such subjects with a caution that never slept, and of all his innumerable acquaintance there was not one who, if asked what were the religious opinions of Theodore Vidal, could have honestly given any other answer than "I don't know."

But although completely devoted to what are called the pleasures of life, and most assuredly bestowing no thought on any other, he had method in his madness. No man could be more alive to the joys that gratified passion can give; but no man, no, not the sackcloth-covered anchorite in his cell could be more convinced than he was, that if the gratification of passion were made the sole or chief business of life, the hours of suffering would out-number those of pleasure a thousand-fold.

So Theodore Vidal did not make the gratification of passion the sole or even the chief business of his life. And yet he was, nevertheless, far, very far, from wishing to tame his sensibilities. There was no direction

in which passion could lead him, that he did not deliberately take from time to time; but just as a well-accomplished epicure dines, cautiously stopping short of such excess as might ruin his constitution, and clinging with strong practical devotion to the immortal saw of Hudibras—

“ He that fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day.”

Carefully as he avoided all ruinous indulgence in play, he would have been grieved to believe himself incapable of feeling the species of fierce excitement which in many natures attends watching the result of an important chance. He would have scorned himself could he have admitted any eye, save that of a boon companion, to witness the mad joy with which—when all circumstances favoured the frolic—he could quaff the sparkling draught which drowned wisdom, in order to give birth to laughter. But not for much would he have known himself incapable of feeling it. And as for love, he would almost have laid down life itself, rather than exist without its enchanting light. The belief—it might in truth be fairly called the knowledge—that he possessed the power of attracting female eyes,

turning female heads, and subjugating female hearts, was certainly dearer to him than any other knowledge whatever.

But there was yet another passion which, had it not been soberly regulated by that power and habit of thinking above-mentioned, might have gone far towards neutralising many of the gifts and graces upon which Theodore Vidal now prided himself. This passion was the love of money. It is not necessary here to enter at full length into any statement of his own pecuniary circumstances; suffice it to say, that he was not without resources, and that rather than have found himself in such a position, he would, at any time, have sacrificed and abandoned the most cherished wish of his soul. This, therefore, might not unfairly, perhaps, be called his *master* passion; and yet, paramount as it certainly was, it was wholly unaccompanied by all the usual symptoms of avarice. The notion of saving was repugnant to his nature, and not even splendid wealth, that darling idol of his imagination, would have continued to be an object of desire, had he been assured that it could only be obtained in his case by the endurance of present privation.

peculiarity of Vidal's success consisted in the remarkable manner in which he contrived to indulge his own favourite tastes in the most resolute and wilful manner, while living almost entirely in dependence on the hospitality of his friends. This power he owed, first to his various agreeable talents, and next to his well-digested observations on their importance to his rich and idle associates.

He owed something, too, to the skill with which he contrived to turn to account the short period of occasional absence which he deemed it judicious to make his admiring friends endure. These intervals he invariably passed abroad, both because it was cheaper, and because it was more difficult, not to say impossible, for any one to follow him during his eclipse, if he wished to prevent it. This going abroad, too, gave him the opportunity of importing (without any duty paid) a variety of foreign articles, which he was sure to find of great use at home. It cost very little to take a regular course of Parisian vaudevilles, melodramas, and little comedies; and still less to make grotesque portraits—which he did admirably well—of all the most striking figures, gentle or simple, that he saw.

too, and, doubtless, might have repeatedly done so very advantageously, had he not been rather too fastidious in taste, to make the doing so agreeable. And when did Theodore Vidal ever make up his mind to do what was otherwise? Having been the spoiled pet of half the women of fashion in London, could he, for the sake of a thousand or two a year, show himself off as the husband of a woman not handsome enough to be coveted by any of his acquaintance? It was a detestable idea! And, besides, the displaying a steady abhorrence to any such scheme, secured him from the degrading imputation of being a fortune-hunter. And he was quite right in thinking this circumstance a very advantageous one.

But during the last London season, it had more than once occurred to Mr. Vidal, that there were few positions more detestable than that of a *ci-devant jeune homme*; and that nothing of this sort attached to a married man, even though growing bald, and decidedly gray. Having meditated on this for some time, he ran over in his memory all the young ladies reputed rich, and being, more-

of his own, or in England, at the houses of other people; and also, whether her style of education, and her style of beauty were such as to fit her for the wife of a *chargé-d'affaires*. For this situation was the "end all here," to which he had long been looking, as what he should endeavour to obtain by the influence of some of his noble friends, when he might chance to feel growing weary of playing eternal first fiddle in their drawing and dining-rooms.

This was the state of mind in which Mr. Theodore Vidal found himself at the time he was first introduced to the society of Lord Randal's neighbours.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE all these gay doings were going on in the immediate neighbourhood of Compton, Mr. Clementson not only refused to let his newly-discovered daughter Mary accept any of the reiterated invitations to join them, but resolutely refused to do so himself.

Had there been less sprightliness, less movement, and less interest in all these visitings, the absence of the kind-hearted, unaffected, gentlemanlike squire of Dalbury would have been more felt. But as it was, the doubts in some quarters, as to which of the two Miss Springfields Mr. Vidal intended to propose for, and the better-informed speculations in others, upon the probable time at which his engagement to Clara Maynard would be

made public, left little leisure for discussion as to the cause of their good neighbour's absconding. Besides, did they not all know that he was going to give them a magnificent *fête* on the 19th of September? and was it not very likely that he might be superintending decorations or changes of some sort or other, in order to render his long-neglected old house fit to be seen?

There was some mixture of truth in these conjectures, though they did not go the length of diving into the manner of life that the squire was actually leading. From the happy moment in which the fortunate idea occurred to him, that the bringing out of his Mary, though it must infallibly lead to her speedy marriage, need not, for that reason, separate them, he had been in the most delightful possible state of spirits, and might be said to enjoy the prospect of the new scenes that were opening before them, almost as much as the young heiress herself.

Happily for him, the habit which he had so carefully taught Mary in her younger days, of constantly coming to him when she was particularly "on pleasure bent," did not forsake her now;

proposing this, and approving that? And then wouldn't there be work for weeks and months, in turning all the idle old rooms over the picture gallery into nurseries? And what a capital family house it might be made if that were done!

Sometimes, when, during the present preparations, she rushed in upon him with some magnificent proposal about hanging a pink and white drapery over a recess in the old library, or arranging all the greenhouse plants in flower-beds in the great hall, because she and Mademoiselle Panache thought it would look so very pretty, she found him, though ready enough to do her bidding and to applaud, as well as approve the innovation, yet so deeply occupied in deciding whether her future morning sitting-room should be the large square apartment looking to the deer park, or the long three-windowed room just over the flower-garden, that he kissed her, and cried, "Yes, yes, yes, dearest," without very well knowing where to hide a rough drawing he was making for an alteration in some of the up-stairs passages; and once he was so entirely entranced in the exquisite delight which these imaginings gave him, that after she had made

him some long speech about Mrs. Morris's thinking it desirable that there should be one room for tea, and another for negus, orgeat, and ices, he replied, "But will your husband think the little blue room to the right of the canopy-room, which, of course, will be the bed-room, will he think it big enough for his dressing-room, Mary?"

The merry shout with which this was received recalled him to the present moment, but it was only to make him feel how exceedingly delightful every thing was that he had now got to think about.

In fact there was not a single individual in the family who did not appear, more or less, to share in the joyous excitement. It seemed in vain that the two governesses reminded each other that as this was the first, so probably it would be the last gala at which they should ever assist at Dalbury Park. The gloomy words were spoken, listened to, and believed, but ere they could be answered, some happy thought connected with the present served completely to divert their attention from the less brilliant future.

One cloud, and one cloud only, arose to obscure

the brightness of the atmosphere in which they all seemed to dwell. The history of its coming and going was as follows:—

From the time that Lucy Dalton had shrewdly perceived from the words of Mary, affectionate as they were, that even *she* contemplated the possibility of their being less together, in the days that were to come, than they had been in the days which were past, she had set the whole force of her intellect upon one object, namely, how she might best, and most profitably, employ the interval that was left, before this inevitable estrangement should take place. Lucy Dalton was perfectly sure that, whenever the time arrived for Miss Clementson to be taken to London, and into the presence of her gracious Majesty the Queen, or anywhere else where it was quite impossible that she could follow her; Lucy was perfectly sure that, whenever this happened, the squire of Dalbury would “*behave very handsomely*” to her; that is to say, she was perfectly sure that he would give, either to her mother or herself, some present in money, which, if carefully disposed of, might assist her in obtaining a respect-

able situation in life. She herself believed that she had learned quite enough to enable her to take the situation of governess, and this, with the four or five hundred pounds which she anticipated, might suffice to satisfy the ambition of her friends for her. But it would not suffice to satisfy her own.

Lucy, as we have already told the reader, was very handsome, and it is very possible that she thought herself still handsomer than she really was. At any rate, it is certain that she fully believed herself to be, beyond the reach of comparison, handsomer than her young mistress, and she was much too learned in romance not to feel that, such being the case, there was at least a chance of her catching a prize from among the many gay young pretenders who were sure to come buzzing about the newly-exhibited heiress. But then this chance depended altogether upon the share she (Lucy) would be permitted to have in the gay doings about to follow upon her young mistress's introduction.

"Her young mistress!" Oh! hateful, execrated phrase! It was, or it might have been, almost forgotten by herself, and it was, in truth, altogether forgotten by Mary; but it was her own mother who,

ten times more perseveringly than any one else, continued to torture her with it. And Lucy dared not check her. She dared not say even to her, "She is not my mistress; she shall not be my mistress. More fitting were it, both for her nature and for mine, that I should be hers." She dared not say this even to her mother, for the hot-tempered woman would have thought her mad, and, virago as she was, might have chid her so loudly for her folly, that every hope would have been wrecked by the disclosure.

No! It was in remembering her daughter's servile condition, and her own, that the drunken widow Dalton found her greatest triumph. Lucy would have silently glided out of her own rank into that of Mary, without startling any one during any part of the process, by calling attention to it; whereas her mother, who was, as we have said, greatly addicted to the beverage which had been the chief consolation of her departed husband, under all the sufferings her violence inflicted on him, knew no pleasure so great as yielding to the inspiration it inspired, and dwelling with drunken eloquence on the great luck of a girl who, having no right to

look for any thing better than the same place, as housemaid, which her mother held before her, had been taken every day of her life to sit in the schoolroom with Miss Mary, and permitted to read and write, and dance and sing with her, just as if she were a lady herself.

Such a mother as this was a terrible affliction to Lucy Dalton, and her secret thoughts concerning her were by no means of a dutiful or affectionate kind; but as this woman's visits were visibly a great annoyance to Mary, the subtle Lucy contrived to gain great credit in the eyes of Mrs. Morris, by making a tearful confession to her of her mother's unhappy failing, and, while dwelling gratefully on Mary's kind endurance of her presence, when she was by no means in a fit condition to appear before her, implored her to take measures to prevent it. A request so full of proper feeling was not likely to be neglected, and the visits of the widow Dalton became so rare as to give her daughter very reasonable hope that they might soon be brought to cease altogether.

Yet still there were great difficulties in the way

of her being suffered to remain near the young heiress when in company, in the same manner that she had done while they were living in seclusion. But it was this which she was determined to accomplish, and if she failed, she resolved, let the consequences to herself be what they might, to leave her ungrateful patroness for ever.

Little did Mary guess the importance now attached by Lucy Dalton to every word she said; but so wild, so playful, and so heedless were her words, that they often defied the analytical process to which they were subjected, leaving very little trace of having any serious meaning whatever. This, however, rendered steadiness of purpose only the more necessary in her companion, and this steadiness was not wanting.

As yet not a word had been said that could be understood to indicate any purpose on the part of Mary that Lucy should, or should not, be present at the ball; but on this question seemed to hang the final destiny of Lucy Dalton. If she were excluded on this occasion, she saw not any reasonable grounds for hoping that she should be admitted on

any other, and so tremendous did the importance of it appear to her, that even her bold and steadfast young spirit shrunk from every thing like a direct inquiry on the subject.

"Papa has done something about my dress, Lucy," said Mary to her one morning, as they were taking a review of all the plants in the greenhouse, in order to decide how they should be disposed of; "I know he has done something, but he will not tell me what. I am quite sure he means to surprise me with something very beautiful. Don't you think so?"

"I have no doubt of it, Miss Mary," replied Lucy, her delicate complexion varying as she spoke. "If he has ordered you any dress at all, you may be quite sure it will be very beautiful."

"Dear soul! How he does love to please me!" said Mary, forgetting the dress, while she thought tenderly of the giver.

"You think, then," said Lucy, after the pause of a moment, "that your father would not think it right for you, or for any body, I suppose, to appear that evening without a new dress?"

“Any body? Oh! dear no, I don’t suppose he cares about any body else. You do not fancy he will think of any other person’s dress, do you?”

“No, very likely not. But yet I think it is very likely, too, that he may wish every body to be well dressed, and look nicely,” said Lucy.

“What? All the people he has asked for miles and miles round? Do you really think he will care how they are dressed?” returned Mary, laughing. “It seems to me such a very droll idea.”

“We are not thinking of the same sort of thing,” returned Lucy, almost in a whisper.

“Are we not? Then I am sure I don’t know what you mean,” returned Mary, carelessly. “Look at this lovely lily, Lucy Dalton! What magnificent leaves! And what a glorious colour! Would it not be beautiful, if we could mount it up, somehow or other, so as to make the centre of the great flower parterre in the hall?”

* * * * *

Day after day passed away, and though each one witnessed many such little attempts as the above on the part of Lucy, she made not the least progress

towards the point she had in view, and at length, feeling that all her hopes might die and wither away, solely from her own cowardice, she suddenly resolved that she would not again lay down her head to sleep till she knew whether she was to be permitted to appear at the ball or not.

So many round-about attempts had failed, that she now desperately made up her mind to plainly *ask the question*, and had she done so before, she would have saved herself a great deal of suffering.

Her manner of doing it at last, however, was far from unskilful, for she spoke the words, the importance of which half choked her as she uttered them, so playfully as to leave a retreat open for her, under pretence of jesting, if she wished it.

“And pray, Miss Mary, what is to become of me, during your beautiful ball?” she said, looking full in the face of her young mistress as she spoke, with a desperate resolution to know the truth at once.

Mary coloured, for she began to feel that there was, and would be difficulty as to the manner of presenting her old friend, to the new ones, who were so soon expected to crowd round her; and Lucy's question recalled the idea of this difficulty,

upon which she had never yet dwelt for two minutes together, because it was both disagreeable and puzzling. Nevertheless, she had no hesitation in answering, "Where are you to be, Lucy? Why here to be sure. What put such a question as that into your head, dear? Why, I do not believe that you have ever slept at your mother's for months past, have you? And why then should you talk of going away at such a time as this, when there will be so much to see that will amuse you?"

"The whole question shall be settled now, and for ever," thought Lucy, as she listened to these somewhat ambiguous words. "She shall make up her mind either to have me, or to lose me. I will not be her friend to-day, and her servant to-morrow. The fault, perhaps, would not be hers, if it were so. But it would be mine, if I suffered it."

The critical situation of the coachman's daughter at that moment, seemed at once to bring all her budding faculties to maturity, and she no longer shrunk from the task which, before she had entered upon it, had appeared so terrible.

A feeling of conscious power appeared to be awakened within her. It was necessary, that her

intellect should master that of Mary—of Mr. Clementson—of the two governesses—and of every body else, who might chance to oppose her. And she believed herself, and her intellect, capable of doing it. Nor was she much mistaken in thinking so.

There really was little or nothing in her reasonings upon her own position, which could fairly be challenged as false. She was quite as well aware as Mr. Clementson could be, that he had gone a little too far in letting her live with his daughter, on terms so nearly resembling equality. But this was his doing, and not hers, and, therefore, if there was a penalty to be paid for it, it was evidently his business to pay it, and not hers. On the other hand she knew, not only as well, but a good deal better than Mr. Clementson, how much the education she had received by his suffrage, had done for her. She knew that on many points of information, she was superior to Mary—and as to the mysterious something that she felt working within her, and which, if she had named it, she would have called strength of mind, she was as well aware of her superiority in this respect, as she was of being an

inch or two taller than her pretty playfellow. The thinking herself greatly Mary's superior in beauty, mattered little. Probably, most pretty girls, when comparing themselves with other pretty girls, think the same.

In short, there was but one point on which Lucy Dalton greatly blundered, while inwardly rehearsing her claims to companionship with the heiress of Dalbury Park. She overlooked, or it may be, that she was unconscious of the deficiency within her of that moral sense, which had rendered the quiet, steady, earnestly religious instructions of Mrs. Morris available to Mary, but utterly nugatory to her. Mary Clementson, was a pure-hearted young Christian, unpretendingly carrying about with her a sturdy armour of good principles, well calculated to defend her through life against all the worst evils that beset humanity. Lucy Dalton, was a sharp-witted, bold-spirited young woman, who troubled not her spirit with any meditations, laws, or doctrines, which did not obviously refer to her own immediate advantage and convenience.

But of this vital difference between them, Mary was as unconscious as Lucy was unmindful.

In reply to Miss Clementson's words, as given above, Lucy said, her calm blue eye the while steadily fixed upon the face of her companion, "Will you, my dear Miss Clementson, forget your flowers, and even the ball they are to decorate, for one short quarter of an hour, or so, while I speak to you on a subject upon which all the happiness of my life, nay, perhaps my very life itself, depends. Will you listen to me, Miss Mary?"

"To be sure I will, my dear girl," replied Mary, looking frightened at the solemnity of the appeal, "but what can you have got to say to me, that should make you look so very grave?"

"I have told you, Miss Mary, that my happiness, and perhaps my life, depends on your manner of receiving what I am going to say. Can you, therefore, wonder that I should look grave? To you the subject may be, I will not say indifferent, for I know your kindness too well, to believe that possible—but, comparatively speaking, of little consequence, for I am going to speak of myself. When I was a merry, happy little child, Miss Clementson, you had the great misfortune to lose your dear mamma. You scarcely remember her now, I suppose,

but I have been told that you grieved sadly when you lost her. As one way of amusing you, and comforting your affectionate little heart, your papa took me almost entirely away from my own poor mother, who with all her faults was very fond of me. But he consoled her for the want of me, by promising that I should be taught along with you, Miss Mary. And he kept his promise. He kept it only too well. I have been taught along with you. And what is the consequence of it? Why it is this. That while I have been made a suitable companion for you, I have been rendered utterly and for ever unfit to return to the companionship of my mother."

"But who wishes you to return to the companionship of your mother, Lucy?" cried the young lady, eagerly interrupting her. "Papa, and I, and both the old ladies know quite well, that you must not go back to her, Lucy, because. . . ." And here she stopped.

"Because my unhappy mother," resumed Lucy, "having no daughter ever near to comfort her, has fallen into the degrading vice of drunkenness—and assuredly you say truly, when you declare that I

must not go back to her. But this is not enough, Miss Clementson, I am not much more fit to be the companion of your servants, than of my own unfortunate parent. Yet it is not my will, but your father's, which has made me so. Is not this true, Miss Clementson? And do you not feel, that I am ten thousand times worse off now, than I should have been, had I been suffered to remain in the humble cottage in which I was born? Answer this question with your usual truth, dearest Mary!"

"I will answer it with truth, my poor Lucy," replied the heiress, her bright dark eyes filling with tears. "All you have said, is quite true. Oh! quite, quite true! There is but one mistake, Lucy, and that is, when you fancy that my dear, kind, good papa, wants you to be a companion to the servants. I do not know what can have put such a thought into your head. I am quite sure it never came into his."

"But this is not enough, Miss Mary. Does he, or can you, think that it is? Were you indeed going on for ever, leading the same sort of life that you have hitherto done, there would be no diffi-

that I am no longer a fit companion
mother, and that I cannot associate with
vants. Neither have you ever hinted
is your intention, and that of your
should still continue to live where you
remain the humble but beloved share
pastimes, and in all your thoughts. 't
to become of me, Mary? Is it you
your intention, will it be your pleasure
same moment, when you are entering
delightful feelings of enjoyment into a
moments most captivating, and most precious
age, the friend, the companion of your
should be left in the solitude of the life
that has been allotted her, listening to
your happy society in the distance and

Lucy. "Oh! no, no, no. Never, never, never! How can you think me so wicked? How can you think papa could be so wicked?" And as she spoke, the abounding tears fell upon the shoulder of her humble friend.

"But what, then, is to become of me?" persisted Lucy, gently withdrawing herself from the arms of her young mistress. "Your kind words are very sweet to me, but they do not answer this terrible question."

"Terrible question? Why should it be a terrible question?" said Mary, dashing the tears from her eyes with one hand, while the other still rested upon the shoulder of Lucy. "What can you mean by calling it terrible?"

"It is terrible, because it is so difficult to answer," replied Lucy, with solemnity. "If it be not, reply to it at once, Miss Clementson. What is to become of me during the evening of your ball, and during all the other mornings and evenings, during which you are to be surrounded with company? Say, Mary, say! What is to become of me?"

"It is no use, Lucy," replied Mary, suddenly start-

ing up, "it is no use at all for us to sit here tormenting one another in this way. I have never thought about it at all, and therefore, of course, I do not know how to answer you. But every word you have said is as true as Gospel, and papa shall *hear* every word of it. So do you stay quietly here, if you please, till I come back again to you—and then we shall see if you are to go to bed and cry yourself to sleep while I am dancing."

And the eager girl rushed towards the door.

"Stay, dearest Miss Mary, stay one instant!" cried the gasping Lucy, stopping her. "Do not delude your father by making him believe that the question which I have called terrible is, whether I am to be sent to bed or permitted to sit up, and look at your ball. That is not the question. The question must be worded, as I worded it to you just now. What is to become of Lucy Dalton? Think not that I will remain with you as something lower, and more wretched than your meanest servant—classed as a wretched being fit for nothing. This I will not do. But let me be still your dear, but humble friend, and companion, and you will bind me to you, heart and soul, for ever!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE pace at which the heiress of Dalbury conveyed herself from the spot where the above con-
fabulation had taken place, to that in which she
knew she should find her father, had more of haste
than dignity. She did not exactly know what she
meant to say, and that was, perhaps, one reason why
she wished to get it said as quickly as possible; and
another might be that she knew she should be so
very much happier when it was over, because,
though she certainly did feel there was some little
difficulty in the business, it was so impossible for
her to doubt that her dear papa would do whatever
he asked. This pleasant conviction sufficed to sus-
tain her spirits, and she entered, secure, as usual, of
your welcome.

“ Well, Madam Dalbury, what have you got to say now?” exclaimed the squire, extending his left hand behind his back to welcome her, while with the right he continued the employment upon which he was engaged, which was copying a list of comestibles that his old housekeeper had just given him, and which he was to forward by post to a London confectioner, in order that they might all be sent down by the morning train on the important 19th day of the month, for the completion of the magnificent supper she was preparing.

“ I am as busy as a bee, you little vagabond,” he added, “ and I will bet sixpence you are come here wholly and solely to interrupt me.”

“ There you are quite mistaken, papa,” replied Mary, placing herself behind him, putting an arm over each shoulder, and resting her soft little chin on his bald head; “ there you are quite mistaken, for I have something of very great and real importance to say to you.”

“ Then it must be that Mademoiselle Panache has declined practising any more waltzes this morning, and I suppose you want me to come and scold her; but I wont till I have finished this letter, so

take your abominable chin away this very instant, or depend upon it I will make you repent it."

For some reason or other, probably because he wished to see the abominable chin he had mentioned, the squire turned suddenly round, and fixing his eyes upon her sweet face, he immediately perceived that she had been weeping.

"Heyday! what is the meaning of this, my treasure," he exclaimed. "Mrs. More must do without her truffle trumpery, and all the rest of it, if you have got some trouble to talk to me about, my Mary. Tell me what it is, sweetest? Tell me?"

"No, no, papa, it is no trouble. I am quite sure you will not let it be a trouble, though it might be, certainly, if you were not the very kindest, best, and dearest papa in the whole world. But yet, do you know, I think you and I too, papa, have been very thoughtless, and very far from kind, about one thing. But there is no great harm done yet. That is to say, we can very easily set it all right again, if you will consent."

"Consent to what, my darling? What is it that you and I have been about? What mischief have we done, Mary?" said her father.

“ We have forgotten to do what we ought to have done, papa,” replied Mary, “ and that, you know, is almost as bad a sin as doing what we ought not to have done. Only think, papa! We have never said one word to poor Lucy about how she was to go on here, now that you are going to have company, and all that, and the poor girl has been breaking her heart about it; and I am sure we cannot blame her, papa; for, as she truly says, if we don’t let her stay with me always, she will be worse off than the very lowest servant in the kitchen ; for who is she to be with? We cannot send her back now, you know, to her bad drunken mother, can we? because, you know, it is our fault that her mind has been instructed and refined, so as to make her suffer as much as we should do ourselves, if we were obliged to live with such a person. Is not that true, papa?”

“ Did Lucy begin talking about it, my dear? Did she say all this to you, Mary?”

“ Yes, indeed she did, and a great deal more. I do assure you, papa, that it was enough to break one’s heart to hear her;” and tears again rose to the eyes of Mary as she thought of it. “ What is to

become of her, papa, if she is not to stay in the drawing-room, and the ball-room, and the supper-room, and everywhere else where I am to be? What is to become of her, papa?"

"It is all very true, my dear child, it is all perfectly true, and this is not the first time I have thought of it. But it was a disagreeable sort of thinking, Mary, and I have always driven it off, because I have fancied that perhaps she might take it into her head, being so well taught as she is, to go out teaching herself, or something of that sort. But I suppose she is too young for that as yet, poor thing."

"Oh, yes, papa, a great deal too young. Only just fancy my setting up to teach any body, and Lucy is but six months older than I am, you know. Poor dear Lucy! Oh, papa, papa, you could make me so very, very happy,"

"Could I, my best beloved," said the good squire, looking at her with eyes that seemed literally to be melting with tenderness. "Tell me how, my Mary?"

"I will tell you how, papa; and if I don't quite like to say it, and you don't quite like to hear it, because of there being some little difficulty about

it, we ought not to turn away from it on that account, as the difficulty is all of our own making. I know well enough that I did my part of the mischief by never letting anybody have any peace unless I could have pretty little Lucy Dalton to play with me; and your part of the mischief, papa, was letting her come, day after day, and year after year, without ever thinking, as she says herself, poor thing, what was to become of her afterwards."

"Well, my dear," returned good Mr. Clementson, with a sigh, "I will not turn away from it. What is it, Mary, that you would wish me to do?"

"What I would wish," replied Mary, slowly and deliberately, "is, that Lucy Dalton, notwithstanding the change that my being grown up seems likely to make in our manner of living, notwithstanding this, papa, I would wish that she should continue to be with me, just as she is at present. If she has been so educated, papa, as that you have thought her proper company for me, I do not see why she should not be considered as proper company for other ladies also. It may have been a strange fancy, perhaps, that led us to turn a poor cottage girl into a well-educated young woman, but this was our

fault, and not hers, and it is I who ought to suffer the inconvenience, if there be any."

"You have spoken so reasonably, and so well, Mary," returned the squire, "that no father, deserving the name, could have listened to you without pleasure. You are too good, my dear child, to deserve contradiction, and you shall not meet it, Mary, from me. But without contradicting you, dearest, I should like to ask one question. Do you think, my dear, that Lucy Dalton could make herself as happy elsewhere as she would be here, provided I were to give her at once a pretty little fortune, that might give her a right to associate with people as well educated as herself?"

Mary coloured, and looked and felt distressed. This question showed her plainly that her dear indulgent father anticipated inconvenience and embarrassment from Lucy Dalton's becoming a part of his family, and from his having to introduce her as such to neighbours, who must all know her origin so well. And Mary would have given, or suffered much, could she honestly have given such an answer as she knew he wished to hear. But she could not. She believed as firmly in Lucy's at-

tachment to herself, as she did in the fact of her low birth, and she would not, she could not, repay that attachment by treacherously giving up the course she had intrusted to her.

“ Oh ! no, my dearest father, no ! ” replied Mary, looking in his face, so unusually grave, with the fondest affection, “ I wish I could say yes, for I see that ‘ yes ’ would best please you. But I cannot, papa ; I cannot say it, without being both false and cruel. I wish you knew, papa, how painful I feel it to be obliged to vex you, but my heart would never let me be at rest again if I tried to make you believe that Lucy Dalton could be happy anywhere else. I don’t think she would live, papa. I don’t, indeed ! ” And here the tears began again to rain from Mary’s beautiful eyes, and the squire, as they fell, became thoroughly convinced that he must be, without knowing it, one of the very cruelest and most hard-hearted old men in the world.

“ Not a word more, Mary, not a single word more, my darling child, upon the subject. I have settled it all in my own head, my dear, already, as easily as if I had nothing more to perform than taking off my hat, which I will certainly do to

you, my Mary, for having shown me the way to act rightly—and a sadly thoughtless old fellow I have been, to be sure, never to have given the matter any serious attention before. Lucy Dalton shall stay here, my dear, and live with you till she is married, if you like it ; she is a pretty girl, and she shall have a pretty little fortune too, whenever a suitable lover comes forward. And after all, Mary, let folks say what they will, there is nothing so very particularly extraordinary in it. You are not the first motherless young lady of fortune, my dear, who has had what is called an humble companion to live with her; so that's all settled, you see, and now, tell me then about the ball. You would like, my dear, that she should come in, and be nicely dressed, and look like a lady—that's what you mean, isn't it ?”

Mary felt thankful that the high-minded and sensitive Lucy did not hear the terms in which this most welcome proposal came. She was, however, in no humour to quarrel with words, and repaying her father for his ready kindness with a happy burst of smiles and kisses, she began her race back again with much more agreeable feelings than she had brought with her.

But ere she had reached the door, she was arrested by her father's voice.

"Halt, Madam Dalbury! Halt, if you please!" he exclaimed, in his gayest tone. "A pretty ambassador you are! You undertake to carry on the war, and forget the sinews altogether. How is Miss Dalton (remember, Mary, you must always call her Miss Dalton in company), how is Miss Dalton to get a dress for the ball if you do not take her money to pay for it?"

It was Mary's bright eyes that thanked him, as he opened his pocket-book and drew thence a bank-note for ten pounds. "There, my dear, I believe she may have a very nice dress for this sum, and please to give it to her with my love.

"But stop! stop! That is not all, little one. When people are really doing business they must do it thoroughly, or it would be better not to attempt it at all. That's a lesson for you, Miss Mary."

And then, opening a drawer of his writing-table, he took out his check-book, and very seriously assuming the tone of a man of business, he said, "Sit down, Mary; I will not detain you long from your

poor friend, who, doubtless, must be anxious enough for your return; but a few words I must say to you before you go, for they are important. We are now, my dear, in the act of fixing the destiny of this young woman, as far at least as regards her present situation in life. She has been your constant play-fellow and companion, my dear child, and has so conducted herself as to win your affection. This is sufficient to give her great claims upon me. Besides, Mary, it is very certain that if she remains here as your companion, her time, which is in fact all her inheritance, must not be thrown away. It must be paid for, Mary, with the same attention to its value as that of Mrs. Morris or Mademoiselle Panache. It might be painful, perhaps, were I to state this to her, as explicitly as I now do it to you, nor is it necessary. I only wish that she should be told by you that, as she is henceforward to live with you as your companion—if she agrees to accept the situation—it will be necessary that she should be dressed accordingly, and she will receive from me fifty pounds yearly to enable her to do so. Here, my dear, is a check for the first half-year's payment. And now, my Mary, you may go."

With tears of grateful tenderness in her speaking eyes the young heiress once again impressed a kiss on the forehead of her father, and then with a light heart and a light step she sought her friend.

The interval had been one of "doubt and dread" to Lucy, and she was looking very pale, but her very first glance at the face of her young mistress, as hitherto Mary had always been called, at once removed her fears, but at once awakened, and brought into vigorous life a whole host of aspiring hopes, and triumphant self-congratulations. Nevertheless, she was gasping with impatience to hear every word that Mary came to utter, and rescating herself in the favourite chair which Mary always assigned her in all their *tête-à-têtes*, she exclaimed, "Oh, Mary! tell me all!"

"Not if you look at me with the pale frightened face you wore when I first caught sight of you," replied Mary. "Nobody has any business to look pale and frightened, when it is MY FATHER they have got to deal with. Oh Lucy! Lucy! I don't believe there ever was such another heart as his since hearts were first made. How can I tell you all? I cannot tell you all, unless I could paint a hundred

portraits of him, as his dear face varied in expression from gay to grave, and from grave to gay, in sympathy with every thing I felt!"

These were all very pleasant and hopeful words, and Lucy's searching blue eyes appeared to be affectionately fixed on the expressive face of Mary as she uttered them. But Lucy was not a person, where her own interest was concerned, to rest contented with one species of evidence if she could strengthen it by another. And now an almost, nay, as far as Mary was concerned, a quite imperceptible glance at the papers which Mr. Clementson had put into the hands of his daughter, caused an emotion at her heart which speedily sent back the colour to her cheeks, and enabled her to listen with something more than mere patience to Mary's important history, though her desire to know the exact value of what she had seen would have led her to prefer a more brief statement.

The delightful finale, however, came at last; and did it not repay her a thousand-fold for all she had suffered? She had but one regret at that most happy moment, and this arose from her remembering that had she not shrunk with such contemptible coward-

ice from the task, now so successfully performed, she would have had more time for the delicious occupation of studying her dress.

But this regret did not go far towards stilling the tumultuous emotions that were swelling her bosom, and burning on her altered cheeks. Vanity, avarice, ambition, all gratified beyond, oh! far beyond any hope that had ever suggested itself in her most sanguine moments. Ten pounds for a dress! Did not that show that it was the intention, the wish, nay, the will of Mr. Clementson, that she should dress elegantly? Doubtless, his object in this was to gratify his own pride (which in her heart she believed to be his besetting sin), but did she not smile, almost in scorn of him, as she remembered how much more it would do to gratify hers?

But not all these whirling thoughts, and intoxicating feelings, made her forget for a moment the amount of affectionate gratitude which it was necessary she should express to her patroness. This done—and it was very well done—Lucy said, while still pressing the hand of her deluded friend between both her own: “And now, my dearest Miss Mary! you shall let me leave you for an

hour or two. The delightful news you have announced to me is almost overwhelming; and after all that I had been suffering in my mind, before I spoke to you, it produces a revulsion of feeling that makes me long to be alone. Besides, there is much that I ought to think of. It is a great change for me, my dear Miss Clementson!" But now, "*Miss Clementson*" was not uttered as if she were out of sorts, as heretofore, but as if studying to assume a tone of dignified respect, befitting the new relation that now existed between them.

There was a solemnity in Lucy's manner of speaking, which might have led many people to believe, that she wished to submit her spirit to a little serious self-examination, preparatory to entering upon a new period of human existence, and perhaps, Mary was one of them. At any rate she, immediately withdrew her hand, and kissing Lucy's cheek, said, "Go then, my dear girl, and while you think of the great change that has happened to us both, be very sure that it will be my most earnest wish to make it a source of happiness to you in all ways."

Lucy silently and respectfully returned the caress, and left her.

Shall we follow her for a few minutes to the retirement of her little room? It ought to be a pleasant spectacle to contemplate a beautiful young girl in a state of almost overpowering happiness, looking at her lovely face in the glass, as if to see how her joy became her! But it would have had little charm for those who might have had power to look into Lucy Dalton's heart, as well as into the mirror that showed her face. The face was young, and fair; the heart was neither.

Nothing could be less *fair* than the manner in which she settled within that sanctuary, the style in which she might best display her own advantages, at the expense of Mary, by studiously showing off her want of an equally commanding stature, bringing forth into high relief her giddy thoughtlessness and her childish deficiencies of demeanour. Nor could any thing be less *young* than the well-computed chances which occupied her a good half hour as to the amount of profitable presents she might still hope to receive from the heiress, who, as she very ably argued, had got so much into the habit of giv-

ing, that it would not be very easy for her to get out of it.

Neither was there any thing either fair or young in the scanty thoughts which she allotted in the course of her meditations to her mother. If these thoughts had been put in words, they would have run thus: "Her husband left her a hundred pounds in the savings'-bank, and his master allows her twelve shillings a week, entirely on my account, in order to prevent her going on the parish ; so that, in fact, that twelve shillings a week comes from me—and that is quite as much as she has any right to expect from me. What has she ever done for me?—nothing ! Then, why should I ruin myself, in order to do more for her ? I will not do it; it would be contemptible. I should despise myself were I to think of it; she now gets drunk upon gin, and then, perhaps, she might get drunk upon brandy—what should we, either of us, gain by that ? No ! there is but one thing that could be done for her, that would really do any good, either to her or to me."

And as this thought arose the blue eyes of Lucy—those singular blue eyes, which, by a close observer, might always be seen to lose in beauty, what they

gained in expression (except when the expression was a feigned one) ; those singular eyes fixed themselves on the floor of her chamber, and she sat immoveable as she thought.

“ The only thing that would really do any good would be to shut her up in a mad-house ; that would be providing her at once with all the necessaries of life, and keeping her out of all mischief—*effectually*.

“ But it might cost money.—Or it might not ; such things are sometimes done for charity.”

As for the rest of her thoughts, they were of becoming colours, and pictures out of the “ Ladies’ Magazine,” of probable partners and possible lovers to be found at the approaching ball ; and of ways and means for making herself the most prominent, and the most admired object presented to the public eye, upon that, and upon every other occasion.

CHAPTER XIII.

It has been already mentioned, that Arthur Lexington did not like Theodore Vidal, and considering the respective feelings of these two gentlemen for Miss Maynard, this fact cannot be thought very surprising. Nevertheless, Mr. Vidal's loudly proclaimed admiration for that young lady, was by no means the original source of the distaste felt for the new lover by the old one. Neither would it be at all easy to state what was. Arthur Lexington himself would have been extremely puzzled how to explain it satisfactorily; and if hard driven for a reason, why an individual found to be so enchanting by the world in general, should by him be considered so greatly the reverse, he might very

probably have avowed that it was mere natural, or instinctive antipathy, and nothing else.

It must, moreover, be observed that, of all the individuals forming the circle into which Mr. Vidal was now introduced, Arthur Lexington was the one who knew the least of what was going on at the Town Head House relative to his attachment to Clara. And for this simple reason: he had seen them together but three times, and these had all occurred during the first week of their acquaintance. Nevertheless, Arthur Lexington knew, or at any rate he *felt* quite certain, that his antipathy, the graceful inmate of Randal Oaks, was in love with Clara Maynard.

But he did not know, neither did he feel at all certain, that Clara Maynard was in love with him. In plain truth, Lexington had neither right nor reason in thus permitting his soul to be disturbed within him, because another sought to possess himself of the treasure from which he had resolutely turned away, although he *had* done so from very noble motives; but he soon became conscious that it was easier to give her up himself, than to see her married to another.

Somehow or other, however, he did not, he could not believe the rumours, which were every day becoming stronger, respecting the mutual attachment of the man he most hated, and the woman he most loved. It was while he was still living in this miserable state of uncertainty, that he received a letter from his Parisian aunt, Madame Marathone. There was something so exceedingly absurd in the tone of the letter itself, and all his recollections respecting its author were so much in unison with it, that under other circumstances he would probably have replied to it only by a properly civil refusal of the invitation it contained; but as it was, he determined to see Clara once more in the company of Mr. Vidal; and, if he then found reason to believe the reports so generally circulated respecting them, to accept the said invitation, and withdraw himself from a neighbourhood so painfully changed for him. He had been, of course, included in Mr. Clementson's invitation for the 19th of September, and it was at Dalbury Park, that he meant so to watch the often-studied countenance of Clara, as to ascertain, as he doubted not he easily should do, the real situation of her heart.

This eventful ball was now at the distance of only four days, and during that interval he suffered the following epistle to remain unanswered:

“MY DEAR NEPHEW, ARTHUR LEXINGTON.

“I am a good deal surprised that you should never have been civil enough to make me a call. I am sure I did my best to make my house, or rather I suppose I should say my apartment, agreeable to you and your father—and I can't believe that you have ever eat such good ice since. I still think Paris the only place to live in, Mr. Arthur, and it is almost a pity that you should not see a little more of it, as you are still without incumbrance—at least I presume so, for if you had married, I should probably have heard of it. I am married, you know, I dare say you have not forgotten that, and a most charming husband I have got; and I may say again, as I said about Paris, it is almost a pity you should not know a little more of him. As to my inviting you to my house, to my apartment I mean, it is quite impossible; for though we have a dining-room, and three very good drawing-rooms we are badly off for bed-rooms. Indeed, we have

got none at all, except just our own two, and enough half-lighted places to lodge the servants; but if you would make up your mind to give yourself a treat, and to come and pass a fortnight, or so, in this beautiful city, you might dine with us every day, if you would, and that is the only meal that costs much in Paris. A cup of coffee and half-a-dozen fingers may be got for breakfast for a franc, if you find the right places to go to. And there is no need of cutlets and wine for a young man like you, who can't want any artificial strength, and has a good dinner in prospect at six o'clock.

"However, you will do as you like, Arthur Lexington. I know I have no great claims upon your time, but I shall be well pleased to see you, if you do come. I should like to have an answer, however, and, as I know you are a well-behaved young man, I expect you will send me one, if you do not, I shall think you are dead, and set my dear M. Marathone—who certainly is one of the handsomest men you ever saw in your life—to look after your effects; because if you do die without being married, my dear Arthur Lexington, I imagine, that all you leave behind you, will come to

us. For who else could you leave it to? And after all, my dear nephew, you are not so very young. My dear M. Marathone is several years younger, and as I have been told you are not in very good health, I hope that if you do make your will, you will remember that he is your aunt's husband, and that, though we have been married many years, he is still the object of my admiring love. I only wish you could see him, Arthur Lexington, and then you would not wonder at it. Hoping to hear from you soon,

“ I remain, your affectionate aunt,

“ MARY ANNE MARATHONE.

* * * * *

But short as was now the interval before this eagerly expected *fête* was to take place, another event, that must be recorded, preceded it. A first cousin of Mr. Clementson's, the daughter of his father's only brother, had been the object of his earliest, and most vehement fit of love; she was a very lovely creature, but to the heir of Dalbury, who made his first acquaintance with her at the age of nineteen, she really appeared something supernaturally so, his Eton days having passed away

without ever presenting to his view any thing half so charming.

The young lady, though a whole year older than himself was not insensible, as it seemed, to the manifold good gifts that both nature and fortune had bestowed upon her cousin, and the boy and girl were engaged, as firmly as promises could make them, before the father of either had any suspicion of what was going on.

The young lady's father was the first, assisted perhaps by the quick perception of his wife, who made the discovery, which was immediately communicated to the father of the young gentleman.

This brought the affair to a very speedy termination; whatever the reverend younger brother might think of such a connexion, the wealthy elder branch disapproved of it altogether. The enamoured John Jonas Clementson, junior, was sent to travel with a tutor, and before he returned to England, his beautiful cousin had become the wife of a lieutenant in the navy.

These once affianced cousins never met again.

The Squire of Dalbury married a very charming woman, to whom he was devotedly attached, and

having settled down upon the rather early death of his father into a confirmed home-loving country gentleman, the roving, and rather scrambling life of his cousin had kept her completely separated from him. Both she and her husband were now dead, and all that remained of this younger branch of the Clementson race was a certain Richard Herbert, a young sailor of twenty-two, who, though he had passed an excellent examination, and very honourably obtained the rank of lieutenant, as his father had done before him, had not yet been fortunate enough to get placed.

Few tolerably well-born lads had ever fewer friends to push him in the world than Dick Herbert. His father, the only child of a gallant naval officer, who might have left him very well off in the world, had he not been an inveterate gambler, had died while poor Dick was still a very small midddy, leaving no relations in any direction ; and of his mother's family he as yet only knew his once-removed first cousin, Clementson, by name, from his having twice since his mother's death received, through the hands of his agent, the present of a hundred pounds.

The very trifling sum settled upon his mother

upon her marriage, amounting to about one hundred and fifty pounds a year, was all, excepting his hitherto unprofitable profession, which stood between him and starvation. Of this, however, the squire of Dalbury was wholly ignorant, as his relationship, to say nothing of tender recollections, would certainly have led him to have assisted the youth more effectually.

Dick, however, thought himself the very luckiest fellow in the world, for having so generous a cousin, and as the last of these noble windfalls had been accompanied by a very friendly note, saying, that whenever the more important calls of his profession would permit his passing a few days in the country, he would find good fishing and shooting at Dalbury park, and a hearty welcome into the bargain ; the young man, having, to say truth, nothing on earth to do with himself, summoned courage to accept the invitation, and wrote a very proper letter accordingly : which letter reached the park three days before the mighty ball, stating the writer's intention of following it immediately, provided he received no instructions to the contrary.

"Here is more company for you, Mary," said the

squire, tossing the young lieutenant's letter to her across the breakfast-table ; " it is a droll chance, to be sure, that brings the young chap here just now I suppose he will think that we are the very gayest folks in the world with this grand ball going on And if we go back to our old ways afterwards, he may chance to be disappointed. But I don't think we can put him off; it would not be good-natured, Mary, would it ?"

" Good-natured ?" returned Mary, raising her eyes and outspread little hands towards the ceiling; " good-natured?—why I really think that it would be the most atrociously wicked thing that ever was done, and that you must be quite out of your poor, dear, venerable wits, when you thought of it! Fancy, mademoiselle! fancy, Lucy! fancy, Mrs. Morris! Here is a young man who, for any thing we know, may waltz as well as the dancing-master—offering to come down to us exactly in readiness for our ball, and papa proposes to write him a little note requesting that he will not make his appearance till it is over!"

" How should I know, Miss Mary, that you might happen to approve having an unknown inmate for the first time in your life, just at the

very moment when you have so many other things to attend to? But, as far as I am concerned, I have not the least objection to his coming now; only remember, my dear, that he must not be neglected."

"No—no, he shall not be neglected, shall he, Lucy? I should not think any young ladies would neglect any young man just before a ball. I only wish we had got a dozen more coming to stay here, that we might get acquainted with them before the dancing began!"

"And what room, Madam Dalbury, do you mean to allot to your guest?" demanded Mr. Clementson, adding rather gravely, "you must remember, Mary, that now you are grown up, it is your business to see that every thing in the house is well arranged, and all the guests in it comfortable."

"Oh, charming!" she exclaimed, "do you want any more coffee, papa? Pray say no, for I am longing to run up stairs in order to examine all the rooms! Come, Lucy, let us go together, and find out a pretty bright room for the young gentleman, with a table, and books, and an arm-chair, and a

sofa, and a foot-stool. I don't know though, whether young gentlemen use foot-stools, papa never does! But we can put one ready, you know, Lucy, in case he should like it. And there must be some flowers, and one or two of Walter Scott's novels, and a Shakspeare. Oh! we will take care he shall be comfortable."

Before she had finished this rehearsal of her hospitable cares, she was already half way across the hall, Lucy following, while her father laughed heartily, and told the two governesses that they must certainly have made her go through a course of lectures on hospitality, or she never could have displayed such an accurate knowledge of what was necessary, seeing that she had never been an eye witness of any thing of the kind.

The good squire then dispatched a kind and cordial answer to the young sailor, telling him to lose no time, but to make his appearance at Dalbury as soon as possible.

Mr. Clementson was no theoretical sentimentalist, though it occasionally happened in practice that he betrayed a good deal more feeling than he wished to display. In one sense, he had quite

forgotten his beautiful young cousin, Selina, the mother of his expected guest. He had forgotten how vehemently, how passionately he had loved her. Having been perfectly happy in his marriage, he never wasted his hours in comparing the beauty of the woman he possessed, with that of any other woman whatever, and in retracing the mother's features in his child, he had never been tempted to recall the image of one lovelier still. He sat in expectation, therefore, of the arrival of Richard Herbert, with the most perfect composure, only hoping that he would come down by the right train that there might be no doubt about his being ready for dinner.

But when he saw a tall, slight young man enter, with a small Grecian head, features of the most classic regularity, close curled black hair, a pale clear brown complexion, and dark violet-coloured eyes, the like of which he had never seen but once, he was overpowered, perfectly overpowered by the unexpected resemblance, and his eyes filled with tears as he clasped the extended hand of the young tailor, and looked wistfully and silently in his face.

The young man coloured, and looked embar-

rassed, for there was something unexpected in this reception. And then the likeness became stronger still, and the poor squire exclaimed, passing his hand across his eyes, as if to get rid of some optical delusion: "It is wonderful!"

Another moment, and one more long, earnest look, enabled him to recover himself. And being very far, indeed, from wishing to display the feeling which had seized upon him so unexpectedly, he managed to speak at last in a tolerably rational manner, and to welcome his young relation with equal kindness and propriety.

This recovery of his composure, however, did not prevent the formation of a wish, as earnest as it was sudden, that his darling Mary might view the young man with admiration equal to his own, that in like manner the young man should find Mary as beautiful as he did himself, and that he might live to bless their union, and press their offspring to his heart.

Perhaps the sagacious reader may already have suspected that Mr. Clementson, though possessed of many admirable qualities, was sometimes a little whimsical in his notions, and this sudden desire to

endow a perfectly unknown, and rather distant relation, with his daughter and his ducats, is not a fact likely to remove this impression. Happily, however, for the security of his daughter, her influence over him was much too great to render it likely that he would put any force upon her inclinations on such a point as this, or, indeed, on any other; but, nevertheless, the idea had taken such strong possession of him, that he felt nervously anxious that her first appearance before the eyes of the young man might be as advantageous as possible, and gladly would he have mounted to his daughter's chamber, in order to hint his wishes that she should arrange her pretty curling hair in the most becoming manner possible, and take care to wear a dress that might set off her person to the greatest advantage. But he dared not betray any such unusual anxiety, and he consoled himself by remembering that Mary always did look very pretty, and that it was folly to doubt her looking so now.

Great, therefore, was his dismay, when this idol of his heart, whose first appearance before the eyes of her cousin he was looking forward to with such

anxiety—oh! very great was his dismay, when he saw her enter the library where they were sitting, with her light coloured muslin dress crushed, soiled, and tucked up in the most unsightly manner imaginable, to save it from the still more miserable fate which had betided her petticoat—for that was three inches deep in mud! In her arms she was carrying a huge dirty lamb, that was struggling in the most ungainly manner possible in her embrace, and bleating so piteously, as to make it evident that she was putting it to extreme torture, which completely destroyed the charm, if any such could exist under the circumstances, of supposing that her disordered appearance was occasioned by the playful gambols and affectionate endearments of a petted favourite. Her shoes and stockings, poor girl, were in a condition which perfectly well corresponded with the rest of her garments. And as for her face, it certainly looked as ugly as it possibly could; for, in the first place, it was as red as fire, from heat and exercise, and was, moreover, most wofully disfigured, by having all its usual garniture of shining curls carefully pushed away under her shapeless bonnet; while even her beau-

tiful white throat, which on ordinary occasions very greatly resembled in colour the breast of a swan, was red with heat; and to complete all, her hands were ungloved, swollen to about twice their usual size, and precisely matched in colour to her glowing face.

In order, as it seemed, to set off this lamentable figure in the most striking manner, Lucy Dalton followed her into the room, the very model of quiet elegance, and delicate beauty.

Poor Mr. Clementson really felt, for a moment, as if he could have beaten them both. Nor were his painful feelings at all soothed by what followed.

Hardly knowing whether to thrust Mary out of the room, or to present the young stranger to her, all disfigured as she was, he awkwardly and abruptly decided upon the latter, from a sudden feeling of shame at the idea of sending his heiress out of the room to be dressed, before she could be introduced to company. But he only said: "Your cousin, Mr. Herbert, Mary," without giving the young man the slightest assistance in discovering which of the two strongly contrasted figures was the cousin Mary to whom, he was, of course, ex-

pected to bow, and therefore choosing, it must be presumed, the one he thought most deserving of the honour, he advanced a step towards Lucy, and saluted her with his very best bow.

Inexpressibly provoked, poor Mr. Clementson turned angrily on his heel; upon which Mary, judging of his feelings by her own, supposed he was giving way to an irresistible inclination to laugh, both at her lamentable appearance, and the young man's mistake, and encouraged by the supposed example, she yielded to her own mirthful inclination, and laughed long and heartily.

It was not in the nature of Mr. Clementson to listen very long to such an outbreak of merriment from Mary, and not join in it. The grave and sentimental frame of mind, to which his interview with the young man, and all the thoughts concerning the past and the future had given rise, seemed to pass away, and turning round again, he looked at the grotesque attitude and disfigured garments of his daughter, till he quite forgot his anger, and laughed almost as heartily as herself.

“Be quiet, papa, if you please, and thank me, as I deserve to be thanked,” cried the dirty shepherdess,

making a desperate effort to present the struggling lamb to its owner. "This precious little specimen of your live stock would infallibly have perished in the muddy hole where John Hodges preserves his eels, had it not been saved by my exertions."

"And a very pretty specimen of my live stock you have presented to your cousin, Miss Clementson," replied her father, pointing to her muddy garments, "don't you think that he will give me credit for having brought you up in a most extraordinary manner?"

"Upon my word, papa, I did not know that any body was here," returned Mary, looking a little ashamed of herself; "you must not think that I run in the mud to look for lambs every day, Mr. Herbert; but I dare say you would have done the same, if you had seen this poor little wretch struggling to save its life, without strength enough to manage it without a little help."

"I hope I should, Miss Clementson," replied the lieutenant, laughing a little, and blushing a good deal as he spoke, "and I think you had better give up the young sprawler to me; he struggles like a

porpoise in shallow water; you had better let me have him, I am sure he will hurt you." And without waiting for her permission, the young sailor took the little animal very cleverly out of her arms, and holding it as a rather awkward nurse might hold a baby, desired the squire to tell him what he was to do with it.

"Come with me, my dear boy," replied Mr. Clementson, his good-humour perfectly restored by this approach to good-fellowship on the part of his new acquaintance, as well as by perceiving that Mary, notwithstanding her *déshabille*, certainly did look very pretty, as she stood there, trying to look demure, but longing to indulge in another hearty laugh, as she watched the young gentleman's awkward attempt at nursing; "come with me, and I will show you where you may deposit your nursing. If we set him down here, we shall get into sad disgrace with the housemaid." And the two gentlemen left the room by one door, as the two girls made their exit by the other.

"Well, Lucy! what do you think of the cousin?" said Mary, the moment they found themselves safely

alone ; “ *I think he is quite beautiful ; and if he waltzes as well as he nurses, I am sure Mademoiselle Panache must infallibly fall in love with him.*”

“ Perhaps, Mademoiselle Panache may have the honour of being introduced to your cousin,” replied Lucy, colouring ; “ and if so, she may have a better opportunity of judging his merits than I am likely to enjoy.”

“ Oh ! I am so sorry !” cried Mary, colouring also ; for her two governesses, between them, had left her by no means ignorant of the laws in such cases made, and provided. “ It was altogether my fault, my dearest Lucy, and not papa’s ; he was so completely overpowered by the sight of me, and my lamb, that he forgot you, and the cousin, too. Don’t look vexed, dear, dear Lucy !—don’t look so very grave !”

“ You must not mind how I look now, Miss Clementson,” replied Lucy, with a sigh, “ I must of course expect to be overlooked and forgotten, and I must learn to bear it.”

A less sweet-tempered girl than the heiress of Dalbury might have been more struck with the peevish sort of vanity and alarming readiness to take offence,

displayed by her old playfellow and newly-installed companion, than touched by the mortification which this little accidental neglect had produced. But it was not so with Mary Clementson. It recalled to her the fact of Lucy's humble station, but, at the same moment, it awakened a lively consciousness of the necessity of being watchfully careful of her feelings.

“Such an omission, at such a moment, would never have been noticed by me,” thought Mary, “which proves, that in poor Lucy's situation, the feelings are more alive, more sensitive to trifling attentions, than those of persons more happily situated. I shall be a wretch too cruel, and too bad to live, if I ever neglect her, or suffer her, dear creature, to be neglected by any one ; and as to this new cousin of mine, if he be not very civil, very attentive to her indeed, I will make him understand, that I know how much more valuable an old friend is than a new one.”

Richard Herbert, meanwhile, accompanied, or rather followed Mr. Clementson out of the library, across the noble hall, through a handsome billiard-room to a pretty little vestibule (the principal en-

trance was to the south), which opened upon a very elegant gothic-looking sort of cloister, that, with its pointed arches of good old stone tracery-work, ran along the whole western side of the large mansion. On this western side of the building the well-wooded park stretched itself out as far as the eye could see, and farther, for at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the house, it rose suddenly up a bold-looking bank, thickly covered by very noble oaks and chesnuts, while herds of deer grouped themselves with very picturesque effect under one or two magnificently large single trees, which seemed to stand out like giant sentinels, keeping guard over the sylvan paradise beyond.

Nothing, assuredly, could be much further from Mr. Clementson's thoughts at that moment, than showing off the beauty of his fine old place to his young cousin ; but had it been his especial object to do so, he could not have succeeded better. Young Herbert was greatly struck both by the beauty and the splendour of the place. For any thing he had ever heard to the contrary, indeed, it might have been ten times as splendid, or it might not have possessed one-tenth of the splendour which it did.

Nevertheless, he had somehow or other fancied that he was coming to the house of a very quiet retired old country gentleman, and now it seemed to him that he had got to an abbey, or a castle, or something very grand indeed.

“There ! now you may let your baby run, Richard,” said Mr. Clementson ; “the whole flock are sure to be feeding at this hour behind that thicket yonder, and the muddy little thing will be sure to find its mother amongst them. By Jove, my dear boy, you have got a sample of the eels’ nursery upon your waistcoat, as well as Miss Mary had upon her frock. You must not think she is always such a hoyden, Dick ; she does not in general amuse herself by dabbling in such very dirty water.”

The young man having obeyed Mr. Clementson’s instructions, by setting down the lamb upon the grass, gave another look round him, and was greatly struck by the beauty of the scene. “And that laughter-loving, muddy young lady is the heiress of all this magnificence !” thought he ; “I almost wish I had not invited myself in so very cavalier a manner. Suppose he were to fancy that I was a regular fortune-hunting scamp, and wanting to run away with his heiress ? I’ll take care of that at any rate.”

The thought came lightly, and at that moment, at least, he had no opportunity of dwelling upon it long, for his good-humoured host immediately began talking to him of all sorts of country sports, in order to find out what he might happen to like best, and Richard Herbert was soon beguiled into easy and pleasant chat with him. But the thought, once conceived, was not of a nature to be easily forgotten by the high-spirited young sailor, and it recurred to him afterwards a good deal oftener than was either necessary or agreeable.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CLEMENTSON had no cause to complain of the appearance of his daughter when they met in the drawing-room before dinner. From her earliest childhood, it had always been one of his greatest gratifications to see her well dressed, and "looking very pretty," and as he very properly took care to make this sufficiently known, both to her governesses, and the very accomplished lady's-maid who had the charge of her toilet, it was not the least likely that his wishes in this respect would be neglected ; neither were they, and had she passed her young life as sedulously in company as she had been kept out of it, she could not have been a more thoroughly well-dressed and well-appointed young lady than she was.

I suppose that a feeling, in some degree analogous to coquetry, is indigenous in the heart of

woman. Philosophical observers of all sorts have said so, and I do not think that our experience tends much to prove that they are wrong. So, it was perhaps a feeling of innate coquetry which had made Miss Clementson look at herself in the glass that day at least twice more than it was her custom to do on ordinary occasions, before she descended to the drawing room.

And Lucy Dalton? She, too, looked oftener into her looking-glass than it was her custom to do on ordinary occasions before she descended to the drawing-room—and was this, too, coquetry? Certainly it was, and no one well read in the female heart could doubt it. But coquetry may be worn with a difference as well as *rue*.

Both the girls were pretty, very pretty, and Lieutenant Herbert was quite aware of it.

Mary was not sorry to see, on entering the drawing-room with Lucy, that their young guest was there, and that her father was not. She lost not a moment in saying,

“Mr. Herbert, allow me to introduce you to my friend, Miss Dalton. Mr. Herbert — Miss Dalton.”

Mary felt almost certain, she would have been puzzled to explain how, that her father, if he had introduced them to each other at all, would have named her friend as Lucy Dalton, and not as Miss Dalton, and she felt quite certain that if he had done so, her friend would not have liked it.

Few, very few, were the occasions upon which Mary Clementson could have rejoiced at the absence of her father, because it afforded her an opportunity of doing something that she thought he would not quite approve. But in this instance she easily reconciled it to her conscience, by remembering that her papa was a man, and that men never could enter into the feelings of young girls, as young girls could into the feelings of each other.

She could not help being aware, for she had seen instances of it a hundred times, that her father did not think it necessary to bury in eternal oblivion the fact of Lucy's having a mother living in the village; neither did it seem to occur to him that it would be proper to address his late coachman's daughter in the same style that he would have expected his own daughter to be addressed, nor was Mary herself, quite sure that he was wrong in this. But she

was quite sure that she knew a vast deal better than her dear father could do, the intense pain which any allusion to either of her parents caused to Lucy. Mary wished it were otherwise. She would have given a great deal could she have made Lucy understand how much more she was likely to be respected for remembering her parents, than by forgetting them. But it was much more in Mary's way to perform duties herself, than to preach about them to other people. She knew that it was her duty to make Lucy as happy in the home to which she had transplanted her, as it was in her power to do; and she was too apt to forget, perhaps, that in performing this duty, she was encouraging Lucy in the breach of one much more sacred, by yielding to her averseness to any mention of her mother.

Richard Herbert did not understand all these hidden springs of action. All that he did see was very agreeable to him. He thought, as he sat down to dinner, that he certainly had two of the prettiest messmates that ever a young fellow was blessed with, and he was beginning to be glad he had come, because Mr. Clementson' was certainly very kind to him, though he still in his heart be-

lieved him to be very proud, and very fond of display.

That he was proud, he was convinced from the fact that he asked his daughter to drink wine with him, before he asked Miss Dalton; and also from a certain slight change of intonation when he addressed the latter, which convinced him, though the beautiful girl was intimate enough in the house to be called "Lucy," that she was not any relation of Mr. Clementson.

Had not Richard Herbert been an observant, sharp-witted young fellow, he certainly would not have observed this. And had he not, moreover, been a thinking, speculative young fellow, he would not have interpreted it in a way so nearly approaching the truth. Perhaps Mr. Clementson's manner to himself assisted this. He was not only kind to him, but he was evidently watchful that the servants should be made aware that he was a personage to be treated with observance and respect.

"That is because I am cousin to the owner of Dalbury Park," thought Richard, with a satirical sort of smile, directed towards his plate. "If that

pretty creature were equally lucky as to her progenitors, she would not hear the footman ordered to bring up '*Lucy Dalton's*' plate for some fish."

And as to his love of display, the quantity of massive old plate that decorated the sideboard, proved it beyond doubt. It never came into his head that it might have been the established custom of the old mansion for centuries, but he fully believed that it was brought forth either to honour or to astonish him.

"I dare say the provident old gentleman thinks that the sight of all this grandeur will keep me in proper order, and prevent my falling in love with his heiress. He need not alarm himself—I hate an heiress. If the two pretty creatures could change places, I shouldn't be sorry. But as it is, if I fall in love with either of the beauties, it will certainly be Miss Lucy—'*Lucy Dalton*,' as he calls her. Poor girl! I wonder if that pretty Mary is kind to her?"

Such were the thoughts with which the handsome young lieutenant amused himself, as he stood alone for a few minutes under the gothic cloisters, to which Mr. Clementson had led him, in their way

from the dining to the drawing-room, in order to show him a family of young pheasants that were domesticated for Mary's amusement, in a small inclosure surrounded by wire net-work, at the corner of the house.

“Now then for coffee, Richard!” said the squire, returning from a short *tete-à-tete* with the gardener, who had called him away from his young guest for the purpose of a private consultation about moving all the old orange-trees into the hall. “Now for coffee, and the ladies. But I have got bad news to carry to Mary. The gardener says that he does not think it will be possible to complete her favorite project of turning the hall into a flower-garden, by means of his venerable orange-trees. He says it will be impossible to get them up the steps without breaking the tubs.”

This melancholy intelligence was communicated to the petted girl with many kind expressions of regret from her good-natured father, and Mary did certainly look a little vexed, though this was not the expression to which her sweet face was calculated to give the most effect.

“Oh! I am so sorry! It would have looked

so very pretty!" she exclaimed, "wouldn't it, Lucy?"

"I dare say it would," replied Lucy, gently and sweetly, "though, to say truth, I don't exactly know what you wanted to do with them."

"Oh, Lucy! how can you be so stupid!" returned Mary, raising her hands in astonishment. "I explained it all to you, and to the gardener, too, so clearly! Don't you think Macnab must be very stupid about it, papa?"

"Upon my honour, dearest, I don't know," replied her father, "I should have thought the thing possible, but I suppose it is not."

"Oh; I am so sorry!" repeated Mary, dolefully shaking her head, "and I have got such quantities of moss ready to make the bank on which they were to be supposed to grow!"

"But wont all your camellas do as well, Mary? You may make a bank of them as high as the moon, if you will?"

"The camellas! Oh, dear papa! you are as bad as Lucy. I want the camellas in half a dozen other places, and I only intended to steal one or two of them to grow wild here and there among the moss."

Mr. Morris and the squire laughed, Mademoiselle Panache looked puzzled, and repeated the word

“steal!” and Lucy looked at her young lady with an aspect of very beautiful good sense, and half-whispered, “Never mind, Miss Clementson, never mind; it will all look very well, depend upon it, without your taking any more trouble about the orange-trees.”

But Mary herself looked so innocently, and childishly disappointed, that the lieutenant forgot for a moment his aversion to heiresses, and said, “Tell me, Miss Clementson, explain to me, will you, what it is you wish to have done?—perhaps I can help you; sailors, you know, are always Jacks-of-all-trades.”

“That’s right, Dick Herbert!” exclaimed the squire, greatly delighted at this further approach to good-fellowship between the cousins; “come along! and let us see if you think any thing can be done.”

The whole party immediately rose, mademoiselle carrying her coffee cup in her hand, and the rest setting theirs down unfinished, and followed Mr. Clementson into the hall.

“Here, my fine fellow! here is the place that Madam Dalbury wants to turn into a flower-garden for this prodigious ball that you have already heard so much about; and, as it is the first frolic of the kind that she ever had in her life, I mean that she

shall be indulged this once if we can manage it. But you must not suppose from this, my young sir, that I am in the habit of spoiling her ; quite the contrary, I assure you ; I never let her do any thing that I do not entirely approve."

The young lieutenant thought that he had discovered in these jesting words of the good squire a gentle hint, which was intended for his particular use and benefit. The nickname of "Madam Dalbury," too, struck him as having a good deal of meaning, and he curled his handsome lip as he thought how much unnecessary trouble the worthy gentleman was giving himself. "However, it is not the poor girl's fault," thought he, "and I'll make some of the old gentleman's hundred and fifty serving men hoist up the tubs for her, if I can. She is such a sweet pretty creature, but it's the other, though, that I intend to fall in love with."

Through the hall they passed by the billiard-room to the cloisters, the further extremity of which opened by an iron-bound, venerable-looking oaken door into a large flower garden, stolen some half century ago from the park, and having its external wall so admirably masked by a belt of fine forest trees and thick underwood, that on the outside it looked more like the entrance to a wood

than the fence of a garden. But the above mentioned door once passed the scene presented to the eye was in the strongest possible contrast to the bold and almost wild-looking sylvan scenery of the park.

It was, in fact, a complete and very perfect flower-garden, with all the fragrance, all the brilliance, and all the undisguised art that properly belongs to that portion of English pleasure-grounds.

On the side fronting the south was a very noble conservatory, into which no fruit-trees of any kind were admitted, and having the one moderate temperature which is, with a little skilful management, capable of keeping in health and beauty the flowers of *almost* every climate on the earth. On about half an acre of finely-shorn turf, in the front of this conservatory, were arranged the noble collection of stately old orange-trees, upon the temporary possession of which Mary had set her heart.

"There, commodore!" said Mr. Clementson, pointing to the mimic grove, "there are the orange-trees, and there are their tubs. What say you? Do you think they may be made to enter the hall by a forced march, or not?"

"I think they might be hoisted, sir, easy enough," replied Richard Herbert, "if we could

get a rope and pulleys. But the worst difficulty is, that I don't see how they are to be got through that narrow Gothic doorway there. I suspect, sir, that these orange-trees must have been sprouting and flourishing for many a year since they were first enclosed in this garden."

"For half a century, I take it, at the very least," replied Mr. Clementson. "What do you say now, my Mary? Do you wish to shear them of half their leafy honours, in order that the other half may be able to get into the hall?"

"Oh! no, no, no, papa! The gods forbid!" exclaimed Mary, laughing. "What a goose I must be, never to have perceived this remarkably obvious fact before! Shall I quarrel with you, Mr. Herbert, for having made my folly obvious to mankind in general, and my much mortified self in particular, or shall I thank you for having been willing to help me if you could?"

"Oh! scold him by all means, Mary," said her father. "It will be so much more feminine. But whether you scold him or thank him, don't call him *Mr.* Herbert. He is the son of my first cousin, Mary, and, therefore, unless he has a particular objection to it, I beg you will call him plain Richard, if you please, or cousin; and, moreover,

give him leave to call you plain Mary, or Cousin Mary, in good, honest, cousin-like style, and not go on Mister and Missing each other, as if your parents had never met in their lives."

"Very well, papa, we will call cousin, if the gentleman so will." returned Mary, her colour a little heightened, but with a very sweetly good-humoured smile.

The young gentleman coloured a great deal more, but replied, with a good grace, that he should be extremely proud of the title; but, nevertheless, his suspicious fancy added: "What does that mean, I wonder?" And again, after the pause of a moment: "Oh! I have it. We are to call each other cousin, to make her, and me, and all the rest of the world understand why it is that poor Dick Herbert has the honour of being here at all."

But then, as if a little ashamed of being so captious, he said: "Well, Cousin Mary! is there any thing that can be done to atone for the loss of the orange-trees? Could you not have the moss-covered bank that you spoke of, with such a background of branches, as should look more forest-like than Burnham Wood does, when it sets off to fulfil the witches' prophecy? Would you give me a discretionary command, sir, to cruise in that fine old

wood that I saw right ahead this morning, when we let the lamb loose! I think if you would venture to do this, and put an able woodman, and a cart and horse under my command for about an hour to-morrow morning before breakfast, I would undertake to promise, that before my cousin opened her eyes to the sun, I would have as handsome a forest in tow as any young lady could desire to have under her command. What say you, sir? Will you trust me?"

"Will Mary be contented with withering oak boughs, instead of flourishing oranges?" said Mr. Clementson, turning towards his daughter as he spoke.

"That will I!" exclaimed Mary, joyfully. "I see my flowery bank, and my forest hung with the coloured lamps, as plainly as if it were all done and lighted up already. Nobody but an English sailor," she added, with an approving nod to Richard, "would ever have thought of turning British oaks to such good account. And as to withering, papa, they shall not wither. Macnab was talking to me the other day about my flower-garden scheme, and told me, that if I wanted any blossoms to hang upon the trellis-work, that is to be put up you know between the pilasters, and over all the doors, he could easily keep them fresh the whole night, if

the butler would only give him empty bottles enough; and the same system may easily be pursued with my forest."

But the sun was now setting, and the moon rising, so Mrs. Morris recommended a retreat into the house, the exit from it having been made without any preparation for night air; and her prudent proposal was complied with, though not without regret, for the night breeze, richly scented with flowers, was delicious, and the nature of the consultation in which they had been engaged, as well as the hopeful manner in which it had terminated, had removed, as if by magic, all shyness and ceremony from the intercourse of the young stranger with his hitherto unknown relations, and Richard thought that he should have enjoyed another half hour in the garden greatly. Both the girls were looking so beautiful, too, in the softened light! That his cousin Mary was the prettiest, he was obliged to confess to himself; though he really tried hard to persuade himself of the contrary. However, he thought they were both very pretty, very pretty indeed; but firmly adhering to his resolution, of falling in love with Lucy, and he knew he *must* fall in love with one of them, it was to her that he turned as they began to retrace their steps towards the house.

The evening, which without this adventure of the orange-trees, might very probably have passed with somewhat of the tedious stiffness which is so often superinduced in a small domestic circle by the arrival of a perfect stranger, appeared to be extremely agreeable to all parties. Lucy, indeed, was more gentle than lively, more timid than gay; but even she ventured to smile occasionally at the droll sallies of the young sailor, who evidently began to find himself very pleasantly at his ease, and chattered away about the approaching ball, and all the fine folks he was to see there, in a manner which proved that, for the time at least, he had forgotten the excessive propensity to pride and ostentation, for which he had given his mother's cousin credit, during the first hours of their personal acquaintance.

There was, indeed, beyond doubt, talent enough in the party to make more than one evening pass agreeably, without any aid from without. The two girls and Mrs. Morris sang together very charmingly; and at length Richard was bold enough to confess that he sang too.

This was a most valuable discovery. His voice was a very fine counter-tenor, and though he had not been so thoroughly well taught as his cousin

Mary, his perfect ear and perfect taste united, enabled him to become a very efficient auxiliary.

And then Mrs. Morris played a waltz, upon which Mary, instantly starting up, seized upon her ever-ready French governess, and giving her cousin to understand that he was to take Lucy, the two couples danced almost unceasingly for nearly an hour.

Upon the whole, Richard Herbert was enchanted with the evening; but he could not help muttering to himself as he went to bed: "Madam Dalburn was vastly careful not to dance with me. I wish both father and daughter would set their hearts rest on that point. They may depend upon it will never make love to the heiress."

CHAPTER XV.

At length the important 19th of September arrived, even at Dalbury Park, where Mary had repeatedly declared it never would come, for that week after week had passed away, and yet that it never seemed a bit nearer. Come at last, however, it certainly did, and, as it happened, a good many people besides Mary Clementson welcomed it with more than common interest. There really did seem an odd sort of fatality at work to render important so very trifling an occurrence as a ball given by a country gentleman at his own old-fashioned mansion, to a score or two of his country neighbours, and their guests, in the shooting season.

That it should create a strong sensation in the house itself, was natural enough. There are very few houses where the giving a ball does not create a sensation. If the heads of the houses where it

occurs are too lazy or too sublime to care much about it, there is sure to be some anxious, estimable, *chargé*, or *chargé d'affaires*, who rests not by day, nor even by night, between the promulgation of the *fête*, and the celebration of it.

That on the present occasion, there should be something more than this, was quite natural. That an unknown little lady, as pretty and as full of animation as Mary Clementson, should be moved, to a very strong degree, by knowing that she was to be displayed for the first time to almost all the fine folks she had ever heard of, in the conspicuous character of mistress of a *fête*, can surprise no properly reflective, and philosophical mind. That the humble confidante of this rustic Tilberina should likewise experience a good deal of agitation is, under all the circumstances of the case, extremely natural, also. Nay, that the stout-hearted father of the young heiress, considering that she was the only creature living whom he very greatly cared about, that he too, should feel a good deal of anxiety as to what would be thought of her, and so forth, cannot be considered as extraordinary. But that any other men and women grown (except perhaps the two governesses), should take any particular interest in so merely countrified an affair may require a little explanation.

In the first place, Vidal, the hero of my tale, had various reasons for caring more about this ball than he had ever cared for any ball before. Hitherto he had never made his appearance on any similar occasion (at least since he had become the accomplished man he now was) without feeling perfectly sure that the eyes whose glances he most coveted would look towards him with hope and gladness. He was, in fact, and he knew it perfectly well, one of the most accomplished amateur dancers that ever adorned the world, in any age or country; and this, among his other good gifts, had certainly assisted to make him the man he was. But this was the first time that he had ever had to dance before the congregated eyes of admiring beauties as an **ENGAGED MAN**, and Vidal only, perhaps, could have felt as he did the importance to his future happiness of this experiment. He certainly did not, when he got up on the morning of this 19th of September, clench his fists convulsively, or strike his forehead with vehemence; but he thought, as he quietly and carefully shaved himself, that if he found that he no longer produced the indescribable sort of flutter which he had so often watched among the very fairest of the fair, when he moved among them, in the act of selecting a partner, if he saw and felt, that

night, that the charm was broken, and that Prospero-like he had wilfully thrown away his wand—he should be very likely to stop short, and think again over every little and great feature of his situation, before he really tied the indissoluble knot. He got up from his skilfully arranged and well-lighted seat; he wiped his perfect razor; he polished it upon his palm, and still he thought and thought.

Had no one ever strung together the odious words *CI-DEVANT JEUNE HOMME*, it is highly probable that Theodore Vidal never would have proposed marriage even to the all-lovely Clara. Yet he had never, even when deciding upon this step, in the fervour of his first admiration, no, never had he for a moment deceived himself with the belief, that Clara was to be the last woman with whom he should fall in love; or what was greatly more important still to his happiness, the last woman who should fall in love with him. He had no intention of making her a bad husband. Far from it. She was really an angel, and he perfectly adored her; but Theodore Vidal had not lived at home and abroad for thirty-seven years without knowing that there were many admirable husbands who were, nevertheless, not a bit better than he intended to be. She was, indeed, for a thousand reasons, exactly the wife to suit him,

and he did, and was sure he always should, love her a great deal too well to make her unhappy. On the contrary, he hoped and fully intended that she should be greatly admired, and, therefore, as a matter of course, extremely happy. He fully intended also to live as much in society as ever, and far from purposing, as the whole race of bad husbands do, to leave his lovely wife at home, he looked forward with the greatest satisfaction to her grace and beauty becoming almost as much the fashion as his own most valuable qualities had been, and (the gods be praised) still were.

Of course, it was another great and important reason for permitting himself to yield to the ardour of the feelings she had inspired, that she was the only possible heir to her two respectable aunts. It was not likely that they were rich. He did not delude himself. He had no idea that they were so. But their house and gardens formed a very pretty property. They must be worth money. There were some old pictures too; one or two landscapes which some of his particular friends might admire.

In short it was altogether a very different thing from marrying a pretty girl with nothing. And though he never in company pronounced the name of Lady Arabella to the daughters who so fondly cherished her memory, without emitting

from his long, half-closed eye a spark that was sure to produce an intelligent smile from all who heard him, he was very far indeed from being insensible to the advantages of a right honourable connexion, and had not been so wanting to himself as not to have ascertained the race from which the noble grandmother of his love descended, or to have neglected such an examination of Lady Randal's peerage as sufficed to assure him that "Lady Arabella Norwell, m. Henry, son of Casimo Jenkins, Esq.," was to be found there.

All this, it is but justice to him to state, he had ascertained before he had made the proposal to Clara, which had been accepted just three days before that fixed for the ball at Dalbury Park.

It was, therefore, at the ball at Dalbury Park that Mr. Vidal meant to make the experiment of appearing as an engaged man. He by no means intended to make this engagement ostentatiously public, on the contrary, he was anxious that it should be for the present as little known as possible. Some men might have anticipated a little difficulty from the double duty of displaying himself to Clara as her devoted lover, yet still preserving the right of continuing before her eyes a candidate for the smiles and the admiration of every other woman in the room. But he did not. He longed for it. It would be just

such a trial of skill as he loved. It was a trial which to others would bring assured failure, but to him, assured success; and he smiled before his looking-glass, and felt that he looked handsomer than ever, as he thought of it.

Arthur Lexington also intended that this ball should be an important one to him, but, as was very natural, his meditations upon it were less gay than those of Vidal.

To Miss Anne Jenkins the ball was very important indeed. It was, she thought, impossible that upon such an occasion she could help perceiving what the squire's real sentiments and intentions towards her were. If he treated her in the same manner as he did the rest of the company, she should know what she ought to think, and she determined she would think it.

Miss Elizabeth was glad to have an opportunity of wearing her mother's diamond ear-rings and brooch, together with the slender pearl spring in the front of her cap; and Clara liked the thoughts of the ball better than she would have done had she been going to it, as she had done once before to a ball at Lord Randal's, with the hope of dancing a great deal with Arthur Lexington, and with the chance of being disappointed.

The Springfields were delighted, "naturally so," at an opportunity for display. They only wished it had been a fancy ball, for then Chatterton might have gone either as Lord Byron or as Mercury, Eleanor as the Comic Muse, and Edith as Sappho.

The Randals and the Monktons were well pleased, as everybody else is, when living in the country, at the prospect of any event that promises a little variety.

But as to Lady Sarah, she had some very gentle feelings in her heart about poor Vidal. She really did pity that man! He was so talented? So superior! and it really grieved her to see that he had suffered himself to be a great deal more seriously touched by her than she had either wished or expected. As to thinking it necessary to look ugly and appear odious, with such a man as that, for fear of his making himself seriously miserable, it was perfectly out of the question, and she was sure Monkton would be excessively provoked with her if she thought of it. Poor Vidal! she could not help it, but she must positively wear her rose-colour and silver, let him look at her as he would. She wished she did not understand the looks of men so well. But she could not help it. It was born with her she believed, and she was afraid that it would only die when she died, if she lived to be a hundred.

As to the unknown remainder of that highly respectable neighbourhood, their feelings on the occasion can only be judged of by our general knowledge of human nature.

Mr. Norman said from the very first that he would not go, for that he had been assured by Mr. Clementson himself, that there was not a single fossil to be found in the house.

It had been agreed between Mary and Lucy, that they should not dress in the same room. Mary had proposed a contrary arrangement, because her own maid was the only person in the house capable of dressing their hair, and the thoughtful girl fancied that if this rather dignified individual were sent up stairs to the little room which was still occupied as heretofore by the coachman's daughter, with orders to dress "Lucy Dalton's" hair, she might show some symptoms of disinclination to the office.

But Lucy assured her so gravely, that unless she were left quite alone to dress, she should get too nervous to appear, that Mary gave way, and they parted.

The heiress's next care was to summon her personal attendant before dinner, and to address her thus:—

"You need not prepare any thing for dressing

before dinner, Marshall. I shall only wash my hands, and you may just smooth my hair. But I wish to speak to you. My father now considers me as a grown up person, Marshall, as I suppose you all know, and amongst other alterations, he has been so kind as to make one that gives me the greatest pleasure of all. He has invited Lucy Dalton, Miss Dalton, as you must all call her for the future, to come and live with me as my friend and companion, and she must be considered and treated by every body in the house as much like a young lady as I am myself. You will please to tell all the servants this, from me, Marshall. The reason that I speak to you about it at this moment is, because it will be necessary for you to dress her hair for her to-night. And I beg that you will take the very greatest pains about it. She has very beautiful hair, you know, and I shall be much pleased with you, if you will dress it so as to set it off to the very greatest advantage."

The young woman to whom this was addressed began to colour the very instant Lucy's name was mentioned, growing redder and redder at every word her young mistress uttered, and when she ceased, she replied stiffly, but in a tone most profoundly respectful:—

"I should be very sorry, Miss Clementson, to

make any difficulty in obeying you in all things, as it is my duty to do as long as I remain your servant. But as to my dressing the hair of your late coachman's daughter, miss, it is altogether out of character and impossible."

"Very well, Marshall," returned Mary, quietly, and without the slightest irritation in voice or manner, "then you must leave me. But I presume you will not go away to-night, and therefore, as you are still my servant, I desire that you will dress Miss Dalton's hair this evening, before you dress mine."

"Indeed, miss," cried the agitated Abigail, bursting into tears, "I cannot do any such thing. It would be no ways decent, Miss Clementson, and you may ask the old ladies, miss, or my master, and I am sure they would tell you the same."

"I shall ask no one, Marshall. You will leave the house directly if you please, and whatever is due or belongs to you shall be sent to you at the Clementson Arms to-morrow morning," said Mary.

"Leave the house directly?" returned the astonished waiting-maid, almost paralyzed by dismay, "leave the house the night of the ball, without your being dressed, miss? Why, it is not possible, miss. Sure you must know it isn't possible. And

all your beautiful things from London that I have been looking over, and setting ready, who is there that can put them on for you, but myself ?”

“I beg that you will give yourself no further trouble about my dress, Marshall. I have not the least doubt that I shall be able, with Anne’s assistance, to put it on very well. Stay one moment, however.”

Having rung her bell twice, which was the signal for the upper house-maid to make her appearance, the young lady sat down, taking a volume that lay upon her toilet, and appeared to set about reading it with very earnest attention.

The woman looked thunder-struck, and seemed absolutely unable to speak or move from astonishment. The summons given by the bell was speedily obeyed, and the housemaid entered.

“Marshall is going to leave the house directly,” said Mary, addressing her in the most steady and composed voice imaginable, “I shall want your help, Anne, to dress me. Stay here for a moment now. And you, Marshall, lay out upon the bed, immediately, every part of the dress that has just come from London.”

Marshall neither moved nor spoke, but continued to weep and wring her hands.

"If you refuse to lay the dress out yourself, Marshall, tell Anne where she may find it. I wish to see that it is all right, before you go."

"It is impossible, Miss Clementson!" sobbed the rebellious waiting-woman. "Quite entirely impossible!"

"Impossible for you to take out my dress, Marshall? I don't understand you. I insist upon its being taken out, and laid upon the bed, immediately; you do not mean to tell me that this is impossible, I suppose?"

"No! Miss Clementson, no!" cried Mrs. Marshall, apparently recovering her senses. "Only, miss, I wish to speak to you for one half moment by myself."

The air of humility and painful agitation, which had followed the waiting-woman's first burst of anger made the kind-hearted heiress very desirous of complying with this request, and it was not without an effort, that she abstained from desiring Anne to leave the room. But she remembered with a steadiness of purpose that did her honour, that the future position of her humble friend might greatly depend upon her own conduct in the present instance, and she therefore replied firmly, but without harshness, "No, Marshall, I have no wish

to keep secret what is passing between us. On the contrary, I should prefer its being known to the whole family, as the best manner of making them all understand my wishes and intentions respecting Miss Dalton. I ordered you to dress her hair, and you refused, upon which I told you, that you should immediately leave the house, preferring all the inconvenience which might arise from losing your services, to the permitting any one to remain near me, who declared themselves unwilling to treat Miss Dalton in the manner I choose my friend should be treated."

"I beg your pardon, miss," returned Marshall, sobbing, "I know that I forgot myself, but I was so taken by surprise—I will be quite ready to do any thing you bid me, miss, sooner than leave you—for I couldn't bear it."

"Indeed, Marshall, I do not at all wish to part with you," replied Mary. "And for the future, I dare say we shall understand each other better. You may go now, Anne. Yet stay," she added, as the house-maid was making her retreat, "I will tell you now, the arrangement I propose to make for the necessary attendance upon Miss Dalton. And if you have either of you any objection to it, you had better say so at once, if you please. You, Marshall,

must undertake to dress Miss Dalton's hair when any occasion like the present renders it likely that she should wish for your assistance. But she arranges it so beautifully herself, that I dare say she would prefer continuing to do so generally. For this extra trouble, your wages shall be raised one pound every quarter. And you, Anne, must answer Miss Dalton's bell, and constantly wait upon her when she wants attendance, in return for which your wages shall in like manner be increased four pounds a year. Will this satisfy you?" she added, addressing them both.

The two women declared themselves always ready to do every thing and any thing Miss Clementson desired, and returned her a multitude of thanks for her goodness.

This important matter satisfactorily settled, every thing went on prosperously. The great hall, Richard Herbert being engineer-in-chief, was converted into a very complete fairy flower-garden, and when the cargo of coloured lamps, which had been sent from London, were lighted among the branches of the mimic forest which was its boundary, Mary had the inexpressible delight of hearing Mademoiselle Panache exclaim, that the effect was precisely that of Aladdin's

magic garden as represented in a ballet *at the grand opera*.

It certainly was not one of the least happy moments of Mr. Clementson's life, when he first saw his pretty daughter in full dress, parading, like a presiding goddess, as he thought, through the long-neglected but now brilliantly illuminated drawing-rooms of his ancestral mansion.

He had not forgotten Mary's charming mother, nor the still lovelier idol of his first affection, but nevertheless he thought that he had never before seen any thing so beautiful, no, not half so beautiful as his daughter.

And she certainly did appear very pretty, *very* graceful, very captivating, as she looked round *her*, delighted with the aspect of every thing that met her glance, and her bright young eyes flashing with present and anticipated joy.

The good squire, though he had insisted upon himself ordering the dress which his darling was to appear in on the present occasion, had had the wisdom of making his orders to the dressmaker no further specific than that he wished to have a ball dress as elegant as it could be made, for a young girl of seventeen with dark hair and eyes and a bright, though not very ruddy complexion.

The dressmaker was a Frenchwoman, and the squire's confidence was well placed.

No newly-blown snow-drop ever looked more daintily delicate when first emerging from the bosom of its mother earth, than pretty Mary Clementson did, when she met her father and her cousin, on entering the drawing-room, followed by her friend Lucy.

Her dress was, of course, entirely white, and of form and materials not only *à la mode*, but *à la mode de Marie*; for it suited, and fitted her exquisite little figure to perfection. A small coronal of myrtle leaves and blossoms formed her head-dress, and graceful little branches of the same classic flower adorned her dress. All this was, with all its elegance, extremely simple, but there is something in the first indescribable emanation of the nymph-like beauty of seventeen that gives a charm, very decidedly beyond the reach of art, to any costume not positively in bad taste.

Was it because Mary Clementson, by entering the room first, so seized, as it were, upon the admiration of both the old gentleman and the young one, that they really could not recover themselves enough to do justice to the very handsome girl who followed her? It was either this, or that the *style* of Mary

happened to suit the taste of both more than that of her far more brilliant companion; for it is quite certain that, in the eyes of both, the shorter beauty was incomparably more lovely than the taller one.

And yet Lucy Dalton looked very beautiful, too. Her complexion was of that exceedingly delicate tint which is always compared to the wild rose, and which truly more nearly resembles that in colour than any thing else. Her eyes might very justly be called "heavenly blue," for they most accurately matched the hue of the firmament, as we see it in our pale England on a perfectly cloudless day; and for her hair, not all that has been said about "tresses like the morn," can create an idea of more beautifully-flowing light locks than those which fell in copious ringlets on the fair Lucy's bosom.

For her dress, ordered by herself, and concerning which she had consulted no one, she had chosen pale blue satin, covered with transparent gauze of the same colour. Nothing, it must be allowed, could set off the delicate tint of her complexion to greater advantage; but either the dress, or the fair tall young creature that wore it, had less of perfect gracefulness, or, what may, perhaps, be the plain truth after all, she had not, altogether, the look of high-bred elegance which distinguished her little patroness.

"Welcome, fair ladies," said the delighted father, bowing to them both; "we have been waiting for you, at least, this half hour."

It not unfrequently happens, I think, that when parents, from some peculiarity of their nature, appear obstinately bent upon spoiling a child by every word they utter, the child, by a merciful provision of Providence, is somehow or other very mysteriously rendered incapable of being spoiled. And so it was with Mary Clementson. She was simply and firmly persuaded that her father loved her so much better than any body else in the world ever could, that his opinion of her went for nothing. That she loved him the better from so fully comprehending his partial love for her is certain, but it is equally so that it never for a moment raised her opinion of herself in any way. And this really was very fortunate, for had it been otherwise, she certainly must have become one of the most odiously conceited little animals that ever existed.

"Well, Dick," said the squire, after walking completely round his laughing daughter twice, "I must say that, considering the young lady was never full-dressed before, excepting when she wore the fine christening robe that the duchess, her god-mother, sent her, I must say that, considering this,

the young heiress does not look particularly awkward."

Had this appeal been made to him without the words "young heiress" being thrust into it, Richard would have found it very difficult not to answer in a way that might have almost too fully proved his uniformity of opinion with the speaker; but this allusion to her wealth and dignity shot like an ice-bolt through his heart. It was with difficulty that he constrained himself to make a stiff little bow of acquiescence, the coldness of which was a great deal more than sufficient to convince Mary that her dear darling papa was no very good judge of young ladies; or, at any rate, that he was no very fair judge of her.

Yet perhaps there was a little mixture of pride, too, or of wounded vanity, or of a bruised feeling of some sort, in the mental process by which she decided, as her cousin stepped on and paid his compliments to Lucy, that, notwithstanding all his good-nature to her about the forest and the flower-garden, Richard Herbert certainly did not think her worth looking at when Lucy Dalton was by.

But in the next moment all her sweet nature returned to her. She, too, drew near to Lucy, and with most unfeigned pleasure gazed at the delicate

bloom of her fair cheek, and said to herself with equal sincerity and resignation, "No! no! certainly there is nobody but my own papa, who would not agree with cousin Richard!"

Nor was Lucy less sensible than Mary that young Herbert appeared to admire her most; and the fact, even at that exciting moment, set her thinking, and very soberly thinking too, during the few minutes which elapsed before the company began to arrive.

That the young man was not a young man of large fortune she felt perfectly sure; but she was equally so that he had some income to depend upon besides his profession, for this she had gathered from words which had fallen from Mr. Clementson, previous to his arrival. How, then, should she act towards him? How receive the attentions which he was so obviously disposed to pay her? The present moment was certainly not well adapted for deciding so important, so delicate, and so difficult a question. But thought is very rapid, and Lucy Dalton, even before the first party were announced, found time to decide, that to lose the possible chance of winning him, before she was certain of obtaining any thing better, would be highly reprehensible, and in direct defiance of the rule she had laid down for herself, not to suffer any opportunity

of bettering her dependant condition to escape, and to remember always, that it was only upon the present time she could reckon for obtaining the all-important end she had in view.

So when Richard Herbert, just as a party of four ladies and one gentleman came into the room together, asked her to dance the first dance with him, she answered him with that sort of captivating assent, which is more spoken by the eyes than the lips, yet looking so beautifully shy and modest withal, that a man considerably older than Richard might have been inclined to believe as he did, that pretty Lucy Dalton was a perfect model of innocent simplicity and virgin shyness; but with a heart so gentle and so soft withal, as would lead her to repay with tender devotion the affection of any one who really loved her.

The neighbourhood of Dalbury Park did themselves honour that night, on the score of punctuality. The cards had named nine o'clock as the hour for assembling, and before ten the whole of the party had arrived.

There certainly was more than a common degree of curiosity felt concerning the young heiress who was that night to make her first appearance on any stage beyond the nursery and schoolroom. Her

being "a woman grown," was a circumstance which had taken the neighbourhood by surprise, as well as her father; and the most generally received explanation of the suddenness with which this important fact was at length announced to the neighbourhood was, that she had been rigorously kept back by her father's fear that her great expectations would make her an object for all the fortune-hunters in the country; and that she was now only brought out, because the cautious old gentleman had found a match for her that he approved, and that it was most probable her second appearance would be in the character of a bride.

Some, indeed, there were, who clung to a different theory. There generally was some reason, they said, when people did any thing very queer, and out of the common way; and that it was much more likely the poor girl had some personal deformity about her, than that Mr. Clementson had actually shut her up, like a fore-doomed princess in a fairy tale, for fear of her being beset with lovers. But unless it were something very bad indeed, there was little doubt but that Dalbury Park and the surrounding domain would make young men in general exceedingly indulgent.

Those who had held this latter theory, however, showed themselves very amiably open to conviction.

At the very first glance obtained at the moment of their introduction, they very candidly confessed that they were wrong, and that whatever might have been the reason for Mr. Clementson's singular manner of bringing up his daughter, it certainly was not to be found in any personal deformity.

And then the other interpretation of the mystery gained ground, and before the evening was half over there was probably not an individual in the room who had not heard that Miss Clementson, sweet pretty creature! was going to be married immediately.

The young ladies, upon the whole, were very well pleased to hear it. Nothing makes single men so disagreeable, as the having a beauty and an heiress let loose among them.

And as to the generality of the young men who chanced to be present, the having lost a chance before they knew they had it, gave them but little concern.

But, notwithstanding this presumed engagement, Mary was not only the object of very general attention, but was greatly, and in good earnest, admired. One or two particularly swarthy gentlemen, gave the preference to the blue eyes and translucent complexion of Lucy; but these were not

many. One fair creature there was, and only one, whom all that saw her did think, and could not help thinking, handsomer than Mary Clementson. This was Clara Maynard.

Now and then, but not very often (though oftener in England than anywhere else), we see a woman so pre-eminently lovely, that the acknowledging her to be so, is no longer a matter of taste or opinion, but simply the avowal of a matter of fact, too obvious to be either doubted or denied.

The beauty of Clara was of this kind, and one proof that it was so, was the effect it produced on Mary. Strange as it may appear, the young heiress and Miss Maynard had never seen each other before. They might, and probably had, occasionally exchanged glances at each other's bonnets. But Mr. Clementson's seat in church (which was the only spot where even thus much of acquaintance had been made), was most happily situated for one who wished neither to see nor be seen; being in the gallery, and approached by a little, aristocratical, private staircase, from a door that opened in the park. And, indeed, the very church itself seemed, from its arrangement, to be almost his private property, though there was a large "stranger's pew," in which it was not very unusual to see deserters

from the crowded church at Compton, especially on a summer afternoon, when the cool little church itself, as well as the pleasant walk to it across a mile of meadows, made the excursion a very tempting one. But the high curtains which surrounded the magnificent pew of the squires of Dalbury, prevented the gratification of all such ex-parochial wanderers from being gratified in that direction.

If I venture to say that Mary did the honours of her party well, it must only be understood to mean that she did them well, considering that she had never even been present at a ball in her life. All the company as they entered, were named to her in succession, and she had a bright, innocent smile for all the ladies, and a blushing, shy little bow for all the gentlemen. But when the dancing began, and Lord Randal, in right of his nobility, led her to the top of the room for the first quadrille, it must be confessed that she very nearly forgot the having any duties to perform at all.

She neither felt frightened nor shy. The two ladies who had superintended her education, were both well-bred, clever women, and, with the addition of Lucy, who was by no means deficient in talent, there had always been a degree of movement and pleasant practice in all kinds of accom-

plishment, which had been quite sufficient to prevent the young heiress of Dalbury from feeling terrified at standing up to a dance.

Moreover, Mary loved dancing exceedingly, and when the quadrille ceased and the waltz began, she was too happy to think of any thing but the pleasure of the scene.

Sir Willim Monkton, though not very young, was an excellent waltzer, and it was with him that Mary enjoyed, for the first time, that very fascinating dance, with a stronger arm to sustain her in the mazy flight, than that of Mademoiselle Panache or of Lucy. And greatly did she enjoy it, and beautifully did she dance. Her pretty little feet, in most Camilla-like style, seemed rather to skim over the floor, than to touch it, and every movement appeared to be more an accompaniment to the music, than something independent of it. Clara watched her with delight, and their pleasure in looking at each other was so mutual, that they approached each other by common consent, and there speedily seemed to be a tacit agreement between them, that they were to be friends.

Vidal, the ever self-possessed and graceful Vidal, had very punctually met the party from the Town Head House at the door of Mr. Clementson's mansion, and made his *entrée*, as he intended to

do, in attendance upon his beautiful and universally admired Clara. There was as much of vanity of love in the glance which returned to her, sending its experienced scrutiny round the room.

There was no lack of beauty there; if there been, Mr. Vidal would have wished himself alone and sitting beside his love at the pianoforte in every-day drawing-room at the Town Head Hotel. But as it was, he was much happier in the Dalrymple ball-room.

To be the acknowledged lover of a woman who was only the best-looking among a party of dowagers would have been but a sorry triumph for such a man as Vidal. But he looked round him, and saw many very pretty women.

He looked at Lady Sarah, and thought her very perfection of elegance and grace—At Lady Anne and acknowledged that in her peculiar style too, was perfect—At Mary, and then he was ready to declare that she deserved all the obtrusive admiration she elicited. And then he looked at Clara.

That look was as full of triumph as of love. He believed, and he was not, perhaps, far wrong, that the earth could not show a lovelier woman, and deeply did he enjoy the happiness of feeling that, having reached the period of existence

he was likely to gain, more than he could lose, by marrying, the woman appointed by fate to be his wife, must be acknowledged by all who should look at her, as one that all the great ones of the earth might covet.

Was there at that moment any possible demonstration of devotion to her, that he did not sedulously display? On ordinary occasions, though well inclined to parade his licensed devotion before the eyes of men, a sort of pitying delicacy restrained his doing so before women, for he knew, beyond the possibility of doubting, that there was not one under fifty, to whom he had been introduced since he came into the neighbourhood, who was not, more or less, in love with him. But now he had no leisure for such pitying gentleness. With Lady Sarah, indeed, he was on the most confidential terms, for having told her that if the only woman he had ever seen who united all that he most admired in the sex was out of his reach, and, alas! he knew it but too well!—if such must be the case, all that was left, was to endeavour to soothe a misery (which, if indulged in, would be too great to bear), by giving himself to the one best worth looking at, that he could find.

And Lady Sarah, as she permitted him to kiss

her hand after this confidential avowal, told him she thought so too.

So Theodore Vidal towered above his sex for a short space as he made manifest, to all who were sufficiently at leisure to look at him, that he was the adoring and permitted lover of Miss Maynard. Doubtless, there were many who perceived this. And the one who was there on purpose to look out for it—on purpose to be very, very sure that it was so—obtained, at least, the satisfaction of losing doubt in certainty. And before Mr. Clementson's joyous guests had ceased to quaff his Champagne, Arthur Lexington was flying by the night train to London.

One of the party, therefore, who has been mentioned as coming to this ball with an especial purpose, went away *satisfied*, if not exactly *contented*.

The case of Theodore Vidal was different. He certainly was contented, well contented, before the unhappy Lexington left the room; but he was not satisfied. He, too, had come thither with an object, and he had not yet achieved it. And as he remembered this, he started upon the execution of a *tour de force*, the performance of which is, perhaps, to men of his class, the highest degree of enjoyment that this world can give.

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added, that there *was* a charm in that worth all the mere beauty in the world; they thought, every one of them, more of the impression they had evidently made upon him, than of that which they had received themselves.

In the case of Mary, however, the feeling was different. If, upon entering her own gay ball-room, she might have been gifted with the power of wishing, and not in vain, for the partner which she should best have liked, the result would have been her dancing every dance with Richard Herbert. But within a very few minutes of her entering there, her purpose, if she had been desired to form one, would have been altogether changed. It was Lucy he preferred—all his attentions, and almost all his conversation had been for Lucy throughout the whole day, and now his immediately selecting her for his partner, when it would have been so very easy to have asked her before any body came if he had liked it, so clearly proved his preference, that every feeling of her young heart urged her to change such idle wishes, and such almost disgraceful thoughts.

And she did change them, and that too, without an unkind feeling towards Richard himself, or Lucy, or any body else in the world.

And she enjoyed the ball most heartily, and

when, after she had been asked to dance by all the men of title or station who were brought up to her in order by her attentive papa; when, after this was over, she enjoyed the happiness of dancing with Mr. Vidal, she very sensibly felt the difference between a gentleman who happened to admire her as much as Mr. Vidal did, and a cousin Richard who, though she had certainly been very good-natured to him, had never had the civility to ask her to dance at all.

And careful enough was cousin Richard that he would not ask her to dance. If his proud young heart had been alarmed before the ball at the idea of being supposed to aspire to the heiress of Dalbury, his abhorrence of such an idea was multiplied a hundred fold when he saw the admiration she excited, and the fuss that was made about her in the course of it. And never were the wishes of a proud father, when suffering a little of his pride to appear, more thoroughly mistaken than were those of the generous-hearted, affectionate squire of Dalbury, by his high-spirited, but diffident young cousin.

END OF VOL. I.

THE
ATTRACTIVE MAN.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,
AUTHORESS OF THE "VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS
IN AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
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1846.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

THE ATTRACTIVE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

MARY CLEMENTSON could have sat up half the night talking with Lucy of all that had been said or done during the enchanting but too quickly vanished hours of her beautiful ball. But Lucy was sleepy, at least she told Mary so, and assured her that if she attempted to stay up any longer, she should certainly fall fast asleep at her feet. As this was said with every outward testimony of sincerity which yawning, and closing eyelids could give, the unselfish heiress dismissed her with a kiss, saying, with a gay laugh, "Get away with you, heavy head! I am quite

sure that if I could get any body to play for me, I could dance for three hours to come!"

No two young girls could be less alike in most things, than were Mary and Lucy. On this occasion the difference was shown by the wakeful heiress dropping fast asleep the moment she laid her head on the pillow, and her sleepy companion's remaining wide awake for many hours, steadfastly rehearsing to herself all that had passed that night. When the sun rose, however, her eyelids fell, and the coachman's daughter, having enjoyed a refreshing, though not dreamless sleep, for two or three hours, awoke, unfaded either by fatigue or night thoughts, and strong in youth, health, and resolute purpose.

Mary, too, awoke not till the sun was high in heaven, and if all young ladies could always look as bright after a night's dancing as she did, waltzing would very soon be prescribed as a universal panacea, instead of water. The two governesses, also, had desired the housemaid not to open their respective windows till Miss Clementson had risen, so that the squire and his young cousin, who, from some restless principle in their manly natures, had left their beds very little after the usual time, had to wait a good while for their breakfast.

Had not Mr. Clementson been really a very good-natured man, he would have found it impossible to greet the young lieutenant so civilly as he did, for he was angry with him. What business had the young man to affect such great humility as to keep himself out of the way of all the most distinguished part of the company, and to dance with Lucy Dalton instead of her mistress? With such a brilliant destiny before him as might have been his if he had but common sense, and a pair of eyes in his head! It was really too provoking. But what could a man do in such a case? Was he to take his daughter up to him, and say, "Be pleased, young sir, to marry my heiress?" No—by Heaven! he would see him hanged first! He heartily wished he had never seen him at all. What the deuce did he come fidgetting down there for? Nobody wanted him? And yet, confound him, he was one of the finest young fellows he had ever seen in his life. But to see him go on, dance after dance, talking to nobody but that great milk-and-water girl who, with all her prettiness, looked (as he thought) exceedingly like a coachman's daughter, was altogether too provoking; and the sooner the young fellow went, the better he should be pleased. But just as Mr. Clementson's medita-

tions reached this point, the young fellow came into the breakfast-room, looking so wonderfully like his wonderfully well-remembered mother, that a keen feeling of self-reproach for that inhospitable thought, shot through the good squire's heart. And not only the gentle feeling generated by former love, but the sterner one produced by present pride, pleaded in favour of hospitality and longer welcome.

What ! was his Mary of Dalbury,—his fair, young, well-born, wealthy daughter in such a plight that the coldly averted eye of a careless sailor-lad, was to be considered as a misfortune, and punished as a crime?

Squire Clementson felt ashamed of himself, and the consequence was that he extended his hand to Richard with a frank and friendly smile, determined never again to be such a fool as to be angry with the poor boy for falling in love with blue eyes, instead of black. And Richard, while he received this cordial greeting, smiled aside, a little bitterly, perhaps, as he thought to himself that he should probably have been looked at very differently, had he been mad enough to put in his obscure cousinly claim to dance with Mary, to the hindrance of all the lords, knights, and squires that had fluttered round her on the preceding even-

ing. But he thanked his stars, however, that, at any rate, the old gentleman had found out that he did not intend to make love to her.

When at length the whole party assembled at breakfast, there was no symptom of disappointment or discontent on any brow. Mary was radiant; Lucy, placidly beautiful; Mrs. Morris, conscious of having been useful; Mademoiselle Panache, of having been ornamental. Richard, relieved from his proud fear of having his conduct misconstrued, had made up his mind to venture upon being very happy, and the squire was not the man to be insensible to the pleasure of finding himself the centre of so many cheerful faces. Long and pleasantly did they linger over their strong tea, eggs, and coffee. Many of the evening's guests were discussed and criticised, but in a very kind, and, in most cases, a very admiring spirit, while the squire's burden to each strophe that had one or more of them for its subject, was still,

“I think they did seem very much pleased, Mary?”

“What a beautiful dresser is that Milady Monkton!” exclaimed Mademoiselle Panache; “I never saw any thing more perfectly elegant!—no, never!”

“I thought so,” said Mary, “I thought she was the

very perfection of grace. But I do not think I should have dared to say so, if you had not, mademoiselle. In fact, I admired every body so much, that I know it must be partly owing to my newness and ignorance, for I do not think it is possible that every body could be really so beautiful, so graceful, and so well dressed, as they appeared to me. But I suppose I shall get used to it all in time, and then I shall not admire it at all so much. But that will be a pity, too. I was so very, very happy! You enjoyed it, too, dear Lucy, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Mary! to be sure I did!"

There was something in the sound of the phrase "Miss Mary," that grated Mary's feelings, or rather her taste, perhaps, in a way now, that it had never done before. It was last night only, that for the first time they had stood side by side before the world's eye, as friends and companions. Neither the "Mademoiselle Marie," of her French governess, nor the respectful "Miss Clementson," of her English one, brought any such feeling. Was it not that the place she had assigned to Lucy was nearer to her than that of the two respected ladies who had brought her up? And having placed her there, did not every thing that marked her inferior position, become both wrong and painful?

Her father's eye caught hers as Lucy thus replied to her, and he understood her thoughts as clearly as if they had been spoken. He nodded his head to her, and immediately turning to Lucy, said, in a half whisper,

“ You must leave off calling your friend *Miss*, I think. You are both grown-up girls, now, Lucy, and you will observe, my dear, as you go on, that grown-up young ladies, who are friends and companions, never put *Miss* before their Christian names.”

Mary gave him an almost imperceptible nod, and a bright sparkle was emitted from her eyes, that he seemed to catch with his. Their eyes, indeed, were as much alike, considering the difference of age and sex, as eyes could be. They understood each other perfectly. As to Lucy, she smiled very meekly, and she bowed; but nobody there was sharp-witted enough to guess how precious to her were those words of Mr. Clementson. Lucy was by no means ignorant or regardless of the value of money, but she would have given all she had, and we know that she was at that moment very rich, rather than not have heard Mr. Clementson say those words.

And then their talk went on, and many

pretty young ladies were mentioned, and their pretty dresses, too; and some gay-looking, agreeable gentlemen, also, had their names recited with applause; and, of course, while they were on that theme, the most striking male figure that had graced the rooms, was not forgotten.

“And who do you think was the handsomest young man?” said the squire, addressing the whole party, but, nevertheless, looking towards his daughter.

“The handsomest *young* man?” replied Mary, colouring slightly, “I don’t know about that,” (which was not quite true, for she did know, perfectly well,) “but if you ask who was the handsomest man, I can answer you very easily. And I believe that if you asked all the ladies in the room, they would all answer in chorus, Vidal! Vidal! Vidal!”

“You don’t say so, my dear,” replied her father, looking a good deal surprised, “why, that never struck me at all, I confess. It is Lord Randal’s friend that you mean. Well! I don’t know. The ladies are the best judges, but, for my part, I should never have thought of calling him handsome. Very gentlemanly looking, and all that—but dear me, I think. But no matter for that. What do you

say, ladies? Do you all think that Mr. Vidal was the handsomest man in the room?"

And now it was to Lucy Dalton that the squire particularly addressed himself. But she was putting a great deal of sugar in her coffee, and did not appear to hear him.

"Come, ladies, I must have all your opinions," resumed Mr. Clementson, "and as you are the youngest, Lucy Dalton, I shall begin with you."

"About what, sir?" said Lucy, still keeping her eyes upon her coffee cup, and the species of rose upon her cheek changing from Ayrshire to crimson. But her voice was perfectly steady, and her handsome features arranged into an expression of profound composure.

"About what, my dear? Why about the handsomeness of Mr. Vidal. I want to know, if you agree with Mary in thinking he was the handsomest man in the room?"

"I don't think I am a very good judge, sir," replied Lucy, modestly, "but I think I should say that Sir William Monkton was handsomer."

"And so should I, my dear, ten to one," replied the squire, laughing; "and what should you say, Mrs. Morris?"

"Perhaps I might agree with Miss Clementson,

sir, if I might be permitted to add, in the good old-fashioned style, you know, *the present company excepted.*"

He gave her a merry wink with his eye, to show that he both understood and agreed with her; and then, resuming his interrogatory, he begged the Frenchwoman to say what she thought on the subject.

"Why, if I spoke *en artiste*," replied Mademoiselle Panache, I believe I should agree with Miss Lucy, and with you, sir. But I watched this Monsieur Vidal a good deal, when he was dancing with our chere Marie, and I rather think, that if I answer you *comme femme*, I shall agree with her."

"Well, Dick? What do you say?" resumed Mr. Clementson.

"Oh! as you say, sir, the ladies are the best judges. But there is one of them at least, that I agree with. I think, Sir William Monkton incomparably handsomer."

"Oh! for shame! you do not know what nonsense you are talking, cousin Richard!" said Mary, shrugging her shoulders. "I wonder if it be true," she added, rather thoughtfully, "that he is going to be married to that beautiful Miss Maynard?"

For my own part I don't believe a word of it. Nobody that was going to be married to her, could bear to talk to any other woman. Do you believe it, Lucy?"

"No, my dear Mary, I do not," replied Lucy with a placid smile.

"No, no, no, I don't believe a word of that," said the squire. "Clara Maynard is THE BEAUTY, you know, or at least she has been the beauty of all this part of the county for ever-so-long. And that is quite enough to make people say that every new man is going to be married to her."

"She HAS BEEN the beauty, papa?" repeated Mary, indignantly. "Do you mean to say that her beauty is going off?"

"No, I don't," returned the squire, laughing. "So you need not look in such a terrible rage with me. I only mean, that perhaps there may be other beauties coming on, and then you know, she can't be THE beauty any longer."

Mary, who really had no more idea how very pretty she herself was, than if she had never looked in the glass, and who, till she had seen Clara, firmly believed that Lucy Dalton was the most beautiful person in the world, now smiled, with a look of intelligence, and gave a slight glance, which showed

plainly enough that she thought her father was alluding to Lucy.

He saw it, looked slyly at Mrs. Morris, but said nothing.

Lucy herself was convinced of the same fact, and blushed, and looked beautiful, accordingly—while young Herbert, who appeared to have been too assiduously engaged with partridge-pie to take much notice of what was going on, looked up for an instant and gave one short, keen glance at Mary.

For a moment he had believed it impossible that she could have mistaken her father's meaning, and he could not forbear looking up to see how it affected her. But the playful unembarrassed expression of her charming face, instantly convinced him that he was mistaken, and as he followed her eye, which laughingly, and mischievously, was fixed upon the blushing cheek of Lucy, he blushed too—from an emotion that was indefinable. It was partly because Mary was so charmingly unconscious!—and partly, because poor, gentle, innocent Lucy, was so blunderingly conscious. And partly, because he himself was blundering too. For heartily, oh! heartily did he wish that Mary were Lucy, and Lucy Mary. For notwithstanding all his modesty, he could not

help seeing that poor pretty Lucy liked him very much indeed. And if Mary *were* Lucy, and Lucy Mary, why then he would ask her to marry him directly. And they would take their chance about being able to live afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

THE “success” of the pretty heiress of Dalbury, on this her first exhibition to the eyes of her neighbours, was, in drawing-room language, “complete.” It may fairly be doubted, if there was a single dissentient voice to the declaration that she was “charming,” which was the phrase in universal use upon this occasion, and, *upon this occasion*, it really was used as sincerely, as it was freely.

Such being the case, the absolute necessity of giving a succession of *fêtes* in return for the one so tardily, but so successfully given by the squire, was submitted to, not only readily, but joyously. Never in the memory of man had that particular part of the county been so gay. Such a species of animated outpouring of hospitality is always pleasant among tolerably agreeable people, but the presence of the fascinating and accomplished Vidal in the neigh-

bourhood, decidedly made it greatly more so than it could possibly have been without him.

He had already become intimate in so many houses, that without the least appearance of impertinent interference, he contrived to give to all these social gatherings, exactly what shape and form he pleased. At one mansion where the arrangement of the rooms, and the spirit of their owners favoured the project, he suggested a theatrical representation. At another, where the grounds were favourable, a dancing, singing, rambling breakfast party. To one lady, who had four queer looking, but not quite ugly daughters, he pointed out the picturesque effect of a family group (having courage enough to be a little fantastical) at a fancy ball. Where regular balls were considered as efforts too costly and ambitious, he alluded to the extreme agreeability of little waltzing parties, with sandwiches and wine and water.

Spoken charades, be recommended to the witty. *Tableaux vivants* to the fair. And at the Town Head House he proposed, with the assured success of incipient authority, that they should give an amateur concert, in which should be introduced Rossini's choruses of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which not only gives opportunity for some of the sweetest

female choral singing ever composed, but permits the arrangement of that prettiest of pictures, formed by a numerous group of female figures among musical instruments. Neither did he forget to hint, that amidst all this, the good old English fashion of *dining parties* should not be omitted. For Vidal was beginning to feel that no species of amusement, however varied and fascinating, could long atone for the suspension of those well-spread banquets, where obedient digestion *may* wait on appetite, but where the sparkling goblet (so carelessly omitted in the hospitable grace before meat of Macbeth) assuredly brings pleasure to wait upon the guests, leaving health to do the best she can, as servant of all work, afterwards.

When to all this is added the frequent recurrence of pic-nic luncheons, arranged for the amiable purpose of drawing together the early-rising sportsmen at the hungry hour of two, first into one picturesque nook, and then into another, till every spot that was worth looking at in the neighbourhood had been visited, it must be perceived by all intelligent readers, that six weeks so spent were well calculated to produce considerable intimacy among the various individuals thus engaged.

The young lieutenant, though he had felt and

manifested considerable symptoms of shyness on his first reception among the unexpected splendours of his little-known cousin's establishment, soon filled a by no means unimportant part in the gay drama that was going on. Had he been a year or two older perhaps, or had he *not* been the most perfectly unassuming fellow in the world, Mr. Vidal would never have permitted his various talents to have been turned to such good account.

But no man can do every thing—at least not at the same moment, and therefore, having slightly hinted to all the ladies in the neighbourhood (in fact established it as an acknowledged axiom of taste), that features of perfectly regular Grecian beauty, though forming a useful study for an artist in the ideal line, were altogether devoid of interest, he elected Richard Herbert as his right hand man, aide-de-camp, and auxiliary in ordinary. And a better *fitted*, though perfectly dissimilar pair were never united together. For, whereas Vidal uniformly proclaimed himself incapable of doing any thing which he did not himself propose, there seemed nothing that could be proposed by any body, that Richard could not do. And while Vidal never for an instant lost sight of himself, and the gratification, or admiration, or advantage of any kind, which he might by

possibility either gain or lose under this or that arrangement, such a consideration, or any thing in the least degree approaching it, never entered the young sailor's head, from the very beginning of all these gala doings to the end of them.

After he had been about a week at Dalbury, Richard Herbert thought it was time to begin talking of his departure; but Mr. Clementson, though by that time pretty thoroughly convinced that there was no chance whatever of his ever seeing the son of his first love united in holy wedlock to the daughter of his second, had grown so really fond of the youth, that he was in no humour to part with him. And it cannot be denied that he made a most agreeable addition to the domestic circle at the park. He could dance, he could sing, he could read aloud (admirably), he could play character, act both tragedy and comedy if he were set about it, gallop with Mary, botanise with Mrs. Morris (for he had been at the Cape), waltz with Mademoiselle Panache, and make love to Lucy; such love as a young sailor of twenty-two is sure to make to a pretty girl, who takes every possible opportunity of quietly and covertly making him understand that she is exceedingly in love with him.

In short, Richard was so very much liked by

them all, that his good cousin told him, in a tone as peremptory as it was agreeable, that he must be pleased to postpone his departure *sine die*, an intimation which the youth felt not the slightest inclination to disobey.

And the arrangement was advantageous to many parties, for not only did he turn out, as we have said, to be a most valuable acquisition to the neighbourhood, but his continuance in it was decidedly the happy cause of postponing the departure of the two governesses, *sine die*, also.

Mr. Clementson's obliviousness of the flight of time, had certainly caused some remarkable peculiarities in the bringing up of his daughter, but nevertheless, he had some laudable notions of propriety too; and having made up his mind to give poor dear Richard a home, till he could manage to get him employed, he made up his mind also that it would be proper to have something in the shape of a chaperon residing with his daughter.

Mrs. Morris would have done for this situation admirably, and certainly required no assistance from her French coadjutor. But there would have been something very detestable in retaining one, and sending the other away, when both had conducted themselves so irreproachably; and besides, Ma-

demoiselle Panache would have been a dreadful loss at all the domestic waltzings. So as nothing was said by any body about their going, they stayed, and thereby enabled the heiress and her companion to achieve many independent feats, which could not have been attempted without them.

* * * * *

Such, gentle reader, was the visible position of affairs in the pleasant neighbourhood to which I have had the honour of introducing you, and such it apparently continued during several weeks of the sunny autumn of 184—. But there was a good deal going on there too, that was not visible ; and this, for your edification, I shall take the liberty to disclose, hoping that I may not be accused, on this occasion, of any treacherous personality in doing so.

There may be many streams that flow smoothly on before our eyes, without ever suggesting a thought of the dark deep hollows which lie beneath. Yet such there are, and very loathsome life may harbour there.

Mr. Vidal's experiment upon the possibility of not offending an affianced mistress, while carrying on flirtations, gallant, tender, and passionate, with a number of ladies in the same room, had answered completely. The mind of Clara was too lofty, and too loyal, to give easy admission to jealousy; and even had the baleful passion been kindled in her

bosom, it would have expired as soon as born. For she was quite incapable of feeling the little teasing torment of suspicion; and had conviction reached her, it could not have appeared in the shape of jealousy. She might have sighed over a second disappointment, but she never would have uttered the impassioned groan of jealousy.

Perfectly satisfied, therefore, that he ran no risk in doing so, Mr. Vidal deliberately decided upon following, in his new character of an engaged man, the plan that he had so systematically pursued through life, of embellishing his existence with as many and as various delights as fate and fortune placed within his reach, and which he was wont, in his most unreserved moments, to declare were each one rendered more sweet, by being contrasted with that which had preceded it.

None, he said, knew the luxury of repose, who had not first indulged their energy by strong exertion; none could appreciate the stirring joys of rough and bold adventure, who had not been satiated by the ready-made pleasures of a metropolis; none could properly relish port wine, who had not previously nibbled a morsel of Stilton; and so on.

Of the three species of flirtation which, over and

above his serious love-making, Mr. Vidal contrived to carry on at the Dalbury ball, the chief objects were, Mary Clementson, Lady Sarah Monkton, and Lucy Dalton.

To Mary he was gallant—gaily, gracefully, amusingly gallant.

To Lady Sarah he was tender—softly, insinuatingly, bewitchingly, but innoxiously tender; for Lady Sarah knew how to be tender as well as Mr. Vidal.

But it was to Lucy Dalton only, that he was impassioned, for in her case only was there any mixture of truth in the feelings he assumed.

There was a strange sort of sympathy in the characters of Lucy and Vidal ; or rather, they acted like flint and steel upon each other. Vidal, at the moment he first looked at Lucy, was too violently enamoured of Clara, and too much occupied by the grave project of entering, with her peerless beauty at his side, upon a new page of life, to feel the least inclination to undertake another serious affair. And on her side, Lucy was too systematically determined upon *marrying some gentleman* before the heiress got tired of her, to intend to amuse herself with any body whom she had not reason to think might be brought to contribute to this end.

Long before that hour of the evening arrived, at which her claim to the coveted distinction of dancing with Mr. Vidal came round, the striking grace of his fine person, and the captivating vivacity of his manner, had attracted the attention of the coachman's fair daughter; and as her eye followed him, almost unconsciously, she marked how, ever and anon, he turned towards Clara, even while eagerly expressing very ardent admiration to others; and she became convinced that the rest were his visits, but Clara his home.

When at length, therefore, he approached her, which was an honour she was not wholly unprepared for—Lucy knew she was beautiful, and a sort of instinctive knowledge which she possessed in the language of the human eye, had enabled her by that time to know that Mr. Vidal was perfectly aware of it—when at length he approached her, Lucy's heart beat, it is true, but it was only with gratified vanity.

No thought of love; no idea that by possibility *he* might be the man, whom she had sworn to her own heart that she would seek, and find, ever occurred to her.

He asked her to dance, and she raised her large, languishing blue eyes to his face, as she accepted

the proposal. And then he gave her his arm; but the circle of waltzers was rather crowded, and they stood apart awhile. And then he talked to her; and having by this time discovered that she was, in her own peculiar wild-rose style, exceedingly lovely, he permitted his voice to sink into a sort of deep, soft whisper, of the charm of which he was very conscious, and for which he might have been very famous, had all the fair creatures who had listened to it, held sweet (or bitter?) converse together on the subject.

But often as his name and qualities had been canvassed in female conclave, no woman had ever ventured to say to her companions: "What do you think of his whisper?" So the whisper was not so renowned as it ought to have been.

Yes, Lucy Dalton was conscious of the charm. It made her heart start, though the emotion was not at that moment communicated to her outward frame. Nor did Vidal, on this occasion, guess the effect he had produced. Had it been less, he would have seen it more; for the ill-conditioned fairy who presided at Lucy Dalton's birth, had endowed her largely with the gift of coquetry, and it was by the aid of this, that she had already contrived to convince the guileless-hearted Richard

Herbert (for whose Apollo-like beauty she cared not a rush) that she loved him, alas! too well!

But now a terrible, a tyrannic something, which was also a part of her evil-gifted nature, and which, even then, might fairly have been called passion, thrust coquetry aside, and overpowered the stricken girl so completely, that she totally lost the power of making pretty grimaces, suddenly changing into a stern reality all that her precocious art had hitherto been teaching her to simulate.

Thanks to Mademoiselle Panache, Lucy Dalton was an accomplished waltzer. But none who had ever seen her waltz before could have recognised her step now. She felt inspired, wing-borne, soaring beyond the touch of earth.

Mr. Vidal certainly perceived that her dancing was admirable; and he perceived, too, that she moved with more airy and elastic grace than she had displayed before; although her dancing as well as her beauty had decided him to confer on her the distinction she now enjoyed. But Mr. Vidal had not still to learn that he danced well himself, and he thought it was Lucy's delighted perception of this, which now gave wings to her feet.

“Dear creature! she knows what good dancing is,” thought he; “and, in fact, I never ought to dance with any body who does not.”

It boots not to follow them. They certainly danced well together, and were perhaps more accurately matched than they were themselves aware of. Nevertheless, it might be that in some points (supposing the parallel were carried beyond their dancing), it would be found, that though greatly alike, they were not exactly equal. All the difference between them in the present instance, however, arose from the fact, that the imagination and feelings of Vidal (which he perhaps would have called his heart), were in a great degree pre-occupied, while (in the same vulgar parlance) the *heart* of his partner had never before been conscious of any strong impression. Lucy Dalton, while dancing with Vidal, fell in love for the first time; and her love had all that vehemence of passion, which is pretty sure to accompany such feelings, when there is no balance weight in the character to regulate their action.

Not that it was her only passion. The balance weight that was wanting was not the existence of other, or even of opposing passions, but of a corrective regulating principle. No such restraint, either

moral or religious, had ever yet found place amidst the vigorous machinery of Miss Lucy Dalton's mind.

A good deal of what was taking place amidst this machinery was guessed at by Mr. Vidal, but not all. He plainly perceived that the nymph had fallen in love with him; but this had happened to so many nymphs before, that it probably would not have affected him very strongly, had it not been for two circumstances. The first was, the old-fashioned observation, which is generally found to have a good deal of effect in such cases, that is to say, he thought her extremely handsome. The second, that he fancied she was a sort of young lady in whose character there was more vehemence than discretion. But neither the one nor the other, nor even both combined, would have had any dangerous influence over him, situated as he then was, had he been—in short, had he not been Vidal.

As it was, however, she did make an impression on him in some degree approaching what she would have wished to make. Yet, they parted, upon the announcement of the carriage which took him away, in a manner by no means genuinely sympathetic, whatever it might seem to be.

As they shook hands, there was a strong pressure

given by the gentleman, which was slightly—oh! very slightly—responded to by the lady. But this was not the only difference between them. He went, determined to forget her, all charming as she was, if the act of remembering brought the least risk of inconvenience with it—an *if*, the answer to which he was perfectly well contented to leave to the decision of time and accident. She remained, rather *more* steadfastly determined, that he never should forget her, and that let time and accident work as they would, she would master both, and make them her slaves and agents at last.

Ladies and gentlemen are sometimes placed, relatively to each other, in situations somewhat similar to what is here described; and it is generally found, I believe, that when this happens, it is the lady's purpose that gets worn out, and fades away, as it were, before the chilling breath of the gentleman's worldly discretion, while *his* grows stronger in the struggle. Whether such was the result here will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

NOR were the hearts of Lucy Dalton and Mr. Vidal the only portions in the machinery of the drama going on near the innocent-looking little market-town of Compton that were kept out of sight. Nobody, for instance, guessed what was going on in Mary Clementson's heart. No girl, strictly shut up through childhood, ever more heartily enjoyed the gay contrast afforded by an introduction into company, than she did; few so much. There were, indeed, many things in her position particularly well calculated to make her enjoy the change. Many a pretty-enough girl, when first creeping from a chrysalis into a butterfly, flies onward with a timid, fluttering wing, doubtful, and very reasonably so, whether she shall get scorched to a cinder in the flame of a candle; trodden under foot, because

totally overlooked, or till she attained to full-fledged beauty, by all the finest flowers of the parterre.

But Mary Clementson took her flight tormented by no such doubts. She was a very pretty girl ; but that was not all, she was, moreover, an heiress, and all the gayest flowers of the parterre seemed to cry, “ Perch on me ! ”

This made a great difference ; and, in fact, she never went anywhere without being quite sure that she should enjoy herself exceedingly. But what was better still, she never came home again without being equally sure that she should like that too. Her visits to her father at the precious hour of shaving were not left off ;—could she have had the heart to wish it ? She knew almost as well as he did himself, how precious that dear hour was to him ; and it was precious to her, too, for it was then that she indulged herself more freely in discussing all she had seen, nay, all she had felt, too, than she ever did with Lucy.

It would have required more years of life, and much more resolute habits of thinking than Mary then possessed, to have enabled her to explain why she was more perfectly unreserved with her old father, than with her young friend. Nay, it may be doubted, if she herself were conscious how much

this was the case. She was not aware, perhaps, how the kind, fond eyes of her father drew her on, or how the covert smile that often lurked in those of Lucy checked her.

It was after nearly a whole day spent in the pretty grounds of Randal Oaks, that the following conversation took place in the squire's snug little dressing-room. This day had begun by trials of archery skill on the lawn. A handsome, but not a stately banquet, followed by coffee, succeeded by sofas for the idle, and impromptu charades for the active, the whole concluding with what seemed like unpremeditated waltzing, and a supper equally *à l'improviste*.

The party had been by no means a very large one, amounting, at most, to about four or five and twenty people, and was one of those pleasant meetings which sometimes grow out of more ceremonious ones, upon accidentally remembering, that before the end of the moon there is an idle day to spare. The invitations had all been given, *viva voce*, at a ball which took place at some miles distance a few evenings before.

"Did not you think yesterday was one of the pleasantest days we have had yet, papa?" said

Mary, looking up in her father's face with eyes that laughed with the recollection of her own enjoyment of it.

"Yes, I do really think it was ; every body seemed in such capital spirits—didn't they ? I declare, I don't know whether it is Richard Herbert or that wonderfully clever man, Mr. Vidal, who makes every thing go off with such spirit," replied her father, adding, after the interval of a minute, during which he had been applying his Naples soap, "did not they both act admirably well in the charades ?"

"Admirably!" replied Mary, very cordially.

"Which do you think played best, Mary ?" inquired her father.

"I don't know," she answered, colouring slightly ; "perhaps it was Richard ; but I really don't know, both of them are so very clever."

"Ah, Mary !" said the squire, after another short pause, "you never guessed what came into my head when Richard first came down here ; you never found out, did you, that I should have liked to have had him for my son-in-law ; you never guessed that, did you ?"

"No, indeed, papa," replied Mary, now colour-

ing violently ; “ how can you suppose any thing so very—so very unlikely should come into my head?”

“ Why should it have been so very unlikely, Mary ? Do you mean because he is not so rich as you will be ? I hope that was not your notion, because I don’t think it would be worthy of you ; besides, my dear, I never spend my income, and you will find that there would be quite enough for you both.”

This was said, considering that it was spoken by Mr. Clementson to his Mary, rather gravely ; but, to say truth, he did sometimes think that she was not always as affectionately familiar with her cousin as she might have been.

“ Good gracious, papa ! What an idea !” was her reply ; and if he had looked at her, instead of in the glass, at that moment, he might have seen a tear, that was, however, quickly twinkled away.

“ Why, yes, it is a disagreeable idea, and I dare say I ought to beg your pardon for it. But yet, Mary, now we are got upon the subject, I must say that you don’t seem to like him as well as you might do.”

“ Oh, yes ! I do, papa ! I like him quite well enough—I mean, I like him very much.”

“ Well enough, Mary ?” And her father shook his head rather reprov-ingly.

There was another short pause, and then Mary said, “ I wonder you have not observed, papa—I hope I am not doing wrong to mention it, but I tell you every thing—how is it, papa, that you have not observed what seems to me so very obvious; I mean the liking between Richard and Lucy ?”

“ Between Richard and Lucy ? nonsense, Mary ! Richard Herbert knows better than to think of such a thing,” returned the squire, looking a great deal more angry than his daughter had ever seen him before ; “ and it is extremely foolish in you, child, to take such a thing into your head. This may be the reason, perhaps, why you and he have never appeared as friendly and intimate together as I wished you to be ; I wish Lucy Dalton was at Jericho !”

“ Oh, papa ! don’t say that, if you love me ! Think what I must feel at hearing you wish that poor Lucy was out of the way, in order that I might have a better chance of getting somebody to fall in love with me !”

This was said with an uplifted finger, and a reproachful shake of the head ; but there was something playful in the manner, too, and the squire

gladly took refuge in this, and laughed also. For the instant he had said the words, he had felt ashamed of himself, and nothing could be more favourable to the loves of Lucy and Richard, if any such existed, than his having thus sinned, for he immediately made atonement, by declaring, and he meant it, too, that if they really liked each other, he would do nothing to hinder their happiness.

“ And now, Mary, let us talk of something else,” said he, dismissing the thought of his lost cousin and her handsome son with a slight sigh. “ Tell me, Mary, and don’t laugh, dearest, but answer me seriously and sincerely, which should you like best—to have a very rich man, perhaps a nobleman too, fall in love with you, and take you away to some beautiful, fine place of his own, fifty times better, maybe, than our poor Dalbury Park, or marry somebody not too grand or too great to let us all live together here, so that I might always have you with me; and your children too, Mary, if God should grant us such a blessing—which of the two should you prefer?” The squire’s voice trembled, and his lips quivered as he spoke.

But for this, it is likely enough that Mary might have laughed at this premature mention of her little

family, but as it was she sprang into his arms. The razor, fortunately, had been laid down, and kissing him again, and again, and again, she exclaimed: "I had rather stay here, papa, whether married, or not married, ten thousand, thousand times rather than be taken away to the finest palace upon earth, though it were a king or an emperor that took me!"

How very much more delightful a union is between two people who perfectly believe each other than between any two, however amiable, who do not! The squire knew that his Mary spoke the truth, and not a successful lover himself could feel more completely happy at the answer he had so longed to hear, than did the fond-hearted old gentleman as he listened to these words.

Gaily, then, did he go on talking, for his heart was light, though the usual time for Mary's departure was rather more than arrived. But now he began cutting his nails, and as this was one of the operations at which, in French phrase, Mary always assisted, the squire had taught himself to do it in a particularly leisurely manner.

"You have never told me yet, Mary, what you really think of this Mr. Vidal. He certainly seems to be the idol of the whole country, and I don't

know that we can much wonder at it either, for he is one of the most agreeable and the most accomplished gentlemen I ever saw."

As he finished speaking these words Mr. Clementson looked up, and for the first time in her life Mary wished herself anywhere else rather than before his eyes, for somehow or other this direct appeal to her, concerning the good gifts of Mr. Vidal, caused her to blush over face and neck so violently, as to make her very painfully conscious of it.

The kind old man looked at her earnestly for half an instant, and then abruptly turned his eyes away. He also suddenly discovered that his nails did not want any more cutting, and rising up, he said, after the pause of another half instant, during which he pretended to examine his watch: "Dear me, Mary! I must not talk to you any more, or we shall keep the whole family waiting for breakfast, which is abominable. So give me a kiss, dearest, and be off."

The kiss was given, and Mary out of the room with no unnecessary delay. But he remembered the blush a great deal longer than she did.

She knew she had been a great fool; but, luckily, dear papa had not observed it! And here, in order the more fully to explain the excellent Mr. Clementson's state of mind, I must have recourse to

two French phrases, for I know not exactly how to translate them. Both these phrases describe a partially diseased state of mind, but the fact is, that both were applicable to the squire of Dalbury.

In the first place then, his mind was decidedly under the influence of *une idée fixe*, and in the second he was as decidedly haunted by *une bête noir*.

His *idée fixe* was the having Mary married, and herself with her husband, and a prodigious number of children, all living with him at Dalbury Park, till Dalbury Park was no longer his but theirs, save a little freehold of about six feet by three, which he intended to bequeath to himself.

And his *bête noir* was the idea of some man coming to woo her, with whom she might fall passionately in love, but who might be too rich, and too great a man to live in any house but his own, and which, moreover, had been that of his fathers before him.

Both these painful mental maladies might have been cured at once had Richard Herbert been a different sort of youth. But it was useless to think of that any longer. There was no conquering the decrees of Fate. Lucy Dalton had been established in his family (decidedly contrary to his secret wish and private judgment) precisely at the moment

when her being there destroyed one of the most precious hopes he had ever conceived. There was so strange an appearance of fatality in this that he yielded to it as to the visible will of Heaven, and it was truly with a generous feeling, in which piety had a considerable share, that he determined as far as in him lay, to remove every obstacle likely to prevent or retard the happiness of Richard Herbert and Lucy Dalton.

Excellent Mr. Clementson! If the moral of this work should ever be fully understood, it will be found admirably adapted for the correction of one very troublesome branch of parental blundering. Let no old gentlemen, nor old ladies either, take it into their venerable heads that they can comprehend the young workings of the tender passion in their offsprings' hearts!

As to the *positive*, that is to say, as to the landed and monied interests involved in all the acknowledged love affairs going on, I am clearly of opinion that *there* parental interference may often be of considerable advantage to one of the parties, at least, if not to both, and I confess that to my judgment a parent is likely to be more right than wrong, when he expresses his averseness to seeing either daughter

or son take a step or two downward in the scale of society, or commence housekeeping with less than is likely to suffice for the payment of their interesting young bills at the end of the year.

But, for them to venture unasked, unenlightened by any private revelation, to draw conclusions concerning the relative state of the hearts that are swelling, and sinking, and thumping, and throbbing around them. I hold it to be unadvised and injudicious in the greatest degree.

For they will blunder! Alas! how they *do* blunder. Often letting a misconstrued blush, or smile, or whisper, lead them an idle gallop in one direction, while a vast deal of very mischievous business is going on in another, only because they are looking the wrong way.

Nevertheless, Mr. Clementson was so far right, as far as his daughter's blush was concerned, in thinking that it was the mention of Mr. Vidal's name which had occasioned it. In truth, Mary did admire Mr. Vidal very much. She had seen him waltz and play charades. She had heard him sing and read aloud. She had seen him look at her with a great deal of not-to-be-mistaken admiration, and, moreover, she had heard pretty nearly every woman in

the whole circle of her new acquaintance declare, that he was without exception the most fascinating man they had ever met with.

That he *had* looked at her with admiration, nay, even that more than once he had breathed a soft little sigh after doing so, Mary was quite sure, and she made no mistake, Mr. Vidal always did so. It was part of his parade exercise. But Mary did not know this. She never saw his private looks of admiration to other ladies, or heard any of the soft little sighs which followed them. Ladies never do see or hear this particular species of by-play, excepting when it is intended that they should do so; and sometimes it is a great pity they do not.

Mary Clementson, for instance, would have been spared a good deal of uneasiness of various kinds had she known Mr. Vidal a little better. As it was, she not only admired him very much, but she felt concerning him a sensation at her heart, which I know not how to express better than by saying that she felt very much obliged to him. This, I believe, is a sensation which very young girls often feel towards those who take a good deal of notice of them on their first coming out. For it is a fact that they really are rather tiresome than otherwise at that time, excepting in some few rare instances, and

contrary to what usually takes place in the female mind afterwards, they (the very young girls I mean) are more apt to fear criticism than to anticipate admiration.

In short, it is, as I believe, the nature of young females to be diffident till they have been petted and puffed into the persuasion that they have no need to be so.

The sort of reasoning which gives to a wealthy heiress the assurance of being well received, is not a very youthful sort of reasoning, and Mary Clementson was much more likely to pass through life without attaining it than to reach it early. Her companionship with Lucy was another cause for her thinking that the people who did admire her must be very kind. Lucy had been incomparably the prettiest child, a fact which not even the squire himself could deny, and when Mary began to understand what pretty meant, she so unfeignedly adopted this opinion herself, and so sincerely continued to entertain it, when most others had given it up, that it was next to impossible she should begin as early as most very pretty girls do to receive admiration as a matter of course, and to treat it with indifference accordingly.

It was as impossible for her or for any one else not

to perceive that Mr. Vidal was the most distinguished-looking man in the room. The thoughtful-looking, melancholy Lexington, with his dark brown curls, already retiring, as if in deference, from his high and intellectual forehead, had, such as he was, left the Dalbury ball-room too early to be brought into comparison with any one.

Sir William Monkton, though really as handsome as Lucy had declared she thought him, was (though he hated the baronetage for divulging the fact) a year or two past forty, and besides, he was a married man, which to most English-bred young ladies places a gentleman on the shelf.

And as to Richard Herbert, though Mary knew perfectly well in her heart that he was ten thousand times handsomer than any one else there, or probably in the whole world besides; she looked upon him too completely as the property of Lucy to consider it right to think of him at all.

Vidal, therefore, was, beyond all question of comparison, the most distinguished-looking man in the room, on the night of the Dalbury ball, and that he should take so much notice of her as he did, had certainly flattered her a little, and pleased her a good deal.

No one who knows Mr. Vidal, or any body like

him, can feel at all surprised that his devotion to other ladies did not teach Mary to set a juster value upon his attentions to herself. Men who understand the science of making love as well as Theodore Vidal, know perfectly well how to keep their different batteries out of gun-shot of each other.

Yet for all this, Mary Clementson was not in love with Mr. Vidal. But she was just in the condition to make such a fancy possible, if a good deal of trouble and pains were taken to bring it about.

It may, perhaps, seem strange that his positive engagement to the beautiful Miss Maynard should have been kept sufficiently secret to render Mr. Clementson's blunderings possible, for, in fact, there was, as we know, some slight whisper about concerning it. But there were two especial reasons which prevented these whispers from being likely to produce much influence at Dalbury.

CHAPTER IV.

THE first and most important of the preventive reasons alluded to in the last chapter rested upon the exquisite care and skill with which Mr. Vidal contrived on all occasions to keep his own secret concerning his own love affairs. It was really admirable, systematic, steady, unvarying, and unfailing. This first reason acted generally on all the country round; the second concerned the Dalbury family only. Notwithstanding the sturdy, and almost fierce watch and ward which the squire had kept over his little daughter Mary against the inroads of his neighbours in general, and against those of Miss Anne Jenkins in particular, a very great and special degree of intimacy had been maintained between the Town Head House and the Park, so much so that Mr. Clementson very reasonably conceived it to be impossible that any

matrimonial engagement should have been made for Clara without its having been immediately communicated to him; and, therefore, when it was mentioned to him that such a report was in circulation, he scrupled not to say in reply that he was very sure there was no such thing.

But he would soon have known better had there been no ball at Dalbury; for although it was a part of Mr. Vidal's tactics to enforce "*for a thousand reasons*," a profound and "*precious*" secrecy respecting the engagement, Miss Anne Jenkins, to say nothing of her elder sister, would have found it quite impossible (as well as exceedingly absurd) to have maintained it with such a *very* particular friend as Mr. Clementson,

But at that terrible ball the feelings of Miss Anne received a shock which they never recovered, and in the effect of which her sister Elizabeth sympathised perfectly. It will be less tedious to give some description of this effect than to go back to the ball at Dalbury in order to explain the cause of it.

It happened on the morning which followed that important festival, that the two Miss Jenkinse found themselves *tête-à-tête* at their breakfast-table. It was already considerably past the regular hour

appointed for that repast at the Town Head House; but young ladies who have danced a good deal at a ball are apt to lie in bed a good deal later after it than old ladies who have not danced at all; and the pitiful Hannah obtained permission to let Miss Clara sleep on as long as she liked. The sororal *tête-à-tête* was therefore uninterrupted.

It was Miss Elizabeth who entered the room first; she looked extremely grave, and when her sister entered after her she looked graver still.

"Good morning to you, Anne," said Miss Elizabeth.

"Good morning to you, Elizabeth," said Miss Anne.

"Clara, I suppose, is still asleep, poor child," said Miss Anne, with a sigh that might have been more seemingly appropriate had she announced her death.

"Yes, she is," returned Miss Elizabeth, and though the words were followed by no sigh, they were spoken in an accent that seemed to indicate an opinion that the fact announced was rather fortunate than otherwise, under the present very melancholy circumstances.

A silence of a minute or two followed: both the sisters knew that buttered toast was going to be brought in, and both (doubtless) thought that what-

ever they might have upon their minds had better be kept there untouched till Hannah had come and gone.

So as the urn was already on the table, Miss Elizabeth made the tea, washed out the cups, pushed that intended for Clara a little on one side, and then folded her hands together, finger crossing finger with perfect regularity, and her whole person so leaning forward as to be in some sort supported by the tea tray, on the edge of which her folded hands rested.

Miss Anne employed the interval in endeavouring to button her sleeve satisfactorily, which appeared to be a matter of some difficulty; but she was very patient, so at length the sleeve was buttoned, and the toast brought in.

This toast consisted of two tolerably thick rounds from a tolerably large loaf, both very sufficiently buttered, and the two rounds being accurately placed one over the other were cut by the impartial Hannah through and through into six divisions. On plates of toast similar to that here described, the two sisters had uniformly breakfasted for the last twenty years, or perhaps rather more; and it was the privilege of the elder upon its entering the breakfast parlour, to take up the plate, and placing

a knife along the middle section while holding it in a gently sloping direction over another plate appropriated to Miss Anne, to give a slightly propelling motion to the knife, which made one moiety of the dainty mass descend into it.

Miss Elizabeth did this now; but the extreme gravity, nay, almost sternness of her countenance by no means relaxed during the performance of the familiar office, nor did the coming of what used to be a pleasant sort of moment to Miss Anne prevent the repetition of the sigh by which she had before vainly attempted to relieve her heart. The first cup of tea was poured out for each, the cream and sugar demurely added. Miss Anne stretched out her right hand to take that which was intended for her. It had a little less sugar and a little less cream in it than that which was destined for her elder sister; but this trifling inferiority in her allotment was very exactly the same, and no greater, than it had been for many years. It was not this, therefore, which caused the third sigh which now again tightened the drapery over her gentle bosom, and this time the sigh received a response.

“Hah!” was now exhaled with a good deal of force from the breast of Miss Elizabeth, “you don’t seem in spirits to-day, Miss Anne,” she added,

while a frown contracted her brow, "and if the truth must be spoken I can't say that I am very much surprised at it."

"No, sister, I did not expect that you would be surprised," replied Miss Anne, languidly wiping her mouth with the tablecloth from the effects of her first attack upon the buttered toast; "no, I did not expect you would be surprised, for you have always in the main been very kind to me, and I need not tell you that I have no great cause to be in good spirits."

"No, Anne, you have not; in one sense you certainly have not. You had a dose last night that would have been enough to make some women hang themselves; but don't fancy that I want you to do that, I have sometimes urged you on a little, I won't deny it; but I am not going to bid you hang yourself for the sake of a false, hypocritical, make-believe old villain who I don't believe from first to last, ever thought more about marrying you than the man in the moon."

"It was a cruel stroke to me, sister," replied Miss Anne, drawing forth her pocket-handkerchief, "it was a cruel stroke to me when I saw him keep on whispering so to that smooth-faced Mrs. Morris about every earthly thing that passed, as it seemed

to me, and never once showing me the very slightest mark of particular attention; I saw him touch her by the elbow a dozen times at the very least, without any exaggeration, and never did he do any thing to me during the whole night beyond now and then nodding his head and giving me an unmeaning smile—oh, so unmeaning, Elizabeth! indeed it was enough to break one's heart!"

"Your heart must be of terribly crackly stuff, Miss Anne, if it can be broken by such an old fool as he is. You talk of Mrs. Morris, child, I could hit the mark nearer than that I suspect. What do you think of the mademyselle? What's your opinion of her, Miss Anne? Did you see her waltzing away with the young sailor cousin as if she had been fifteen? Well, we shall see; but my belief is that my Lady Randal, and all the rest of them that fell into such raptures at the idea of this ball, as I told you, the night that the old rogue lost his bet, my belief is that now they are once out of his house they won't be over eager to get into it again, I say nothing, I have quite entirely made up my mind that I *will* say nothing; people shall never quote my name for saying any thing that may hurt that poor, dear, unfortunate girl: but this I will say, that if ever an old man made a fool of himself, it is

Mr. Clementson, and if ever I saw a woman that was no better than she ought to be, it is his made-myselle governess."

"Goodness forbid, sister! Goodness forbid!" replied Miss Anne, dismally shaking her head over the tea-cup she was raising to her mouth.

"Goodness, indeed! Don't talk to me of goodness. You can't be such a fool as you pretend to be. You must see what's what, as plainly as I do, if you are not stone blind. But for the matter of that, we have both been fools. How, in the name of common sense, could you and I go on for years and years, listening to the old rogue's twaddle about not letting the lessons be interrupted, without smelling a rat? I have no patience with myself! But he has got to the end of it now, I can promise him. He will never take me in again, if he was to go on talking about his daughter's education till he was black in the face; and it would be no great wonder if that happened any day, for he deserves that a judgment should fall upon him. A false-hearted hypocrite!"

Here there was a short pause, and both sisters got on a little with their toast, and then Miss Anne said, "But if it had not been for *that*, sister, it would have been a beautiful ball, wouldn't it?"

“There is wisdom in proverbs, Miss Anne, and mine is, ‘handsome is that handsome does.’ I don’t believe, and I won’t believe, for the honour and credit of English ladies, that either his Champagne or his Strasburg pies, his in-door gardens, or his out-door parks, will ever prevail upon any respectable ladies to enter his doors again. People would bear a good deal, for the sake of the poor girl, I dare say. But there’s reason in all things,” replied Miss Jenkins.

Again there was a pause, and the toast and the tea were quietly absorbed the while.

“Only to think that it should all end in this way!” resumed Miss Anne. “Only to think, that when we did get into the house, at last, I was doomed to have such a very disappointing evening! Ah! sister, I do believe it is a sin for any of us ever to set our poor hearts upon any thing in this world. But yet I do hope, too, that our dear Clara had a pleasant evening.”

“Why, I don’t exactly know what to say to that either,” replied Miss Elizabeth. “In my younger days, we should not have thought that an engaged lover, like Mr. Vidal, was showing his love very much, if he had danced with all the prettiest ladies in the room, as much as he did. Heaven forbid

that any thing should turn out wrong there ! That would be worse almost than any thing, wouldn't it ? because you know Clara is so very beautiful, that we always seemed to make sure about her."

" And good right we had to do so, sister," replied Miss Anne, " for where can you see any thing like her, anywhere ? I am sure that the heiress is no more to be compared to her than chalk to cheese. And besides, Elizabeth, she has yet all her youth before her. Think of that !"

" I know it, Miss Anne, I know all that, as well as you do, and I don't expect to see her wear the willow for good, I promise you," returned Miss Jenkins ; " but still," she added, slightly knitting her brows, " still I don't understand a man's going away so many times from the side of a young lady that he is engaged to."

" Oh, sister ! sister ! what does all that signify ? Haven't we seen enough to know, Elizabeth, that it is not mere outward attentions that can be trusted to, for showing the state of a gentleman's heart ? Think of the grapes and the pines, Elizabeth ! and then think of what they have all come to ! Mr. Vidal has downright offered to Clara, and take my word for it, sister, that one real offer of marriage is worth all the grapes and pines in the world !" And

here again the unfortunate Miss Anne applied her pocket handkerchief to her eyes.

"That's true enough," replied the elder sister, almost in a whisper, but with the peculiar strength of emphasis which expresses deep conviction.

"I suppose, sister," resumed the younger, after another pause, "I suppose you will not think it right for me to accept any more fruit, or flowers, or any thing of that kind, will you?"

"Why, I am not quite so sure of that," returned Miss Jenkins, briskly; "I have thought of that already, and it strikes me that the sending it back, if it is offered, will look monstrously like pique, Miss Anne, and would be telling him, as plainly as if you spoke it with your lips, that you were disappointed. No, no, I would never do that, you may depend upon it. What I think the proper course to pursue is, to go on taking whatever he chooses to send, just as if nothing had happened, only that for the future I think you should take care to let people understand that you no longer consider that any thing is sent particularly for you. Hannah, for instance, and Clara too. If I were you, I should make a point of making them both understand that the fruit, and the game, and the flowers, and every thing, are intended for me, as much as for you."

“Perhaps that will be the best way, sister,” replied Miss Anne, gently.

And here the *tête-à-tête* ended, for Clara, looking as lovely as if she had not been dancing all night, now entered the room, gave each of her aunts a precious kiss, and made a thousand laughing apologies for being so late.

It was quite evident that, whatever the elderly ladies might think on the subject, she had found nothing to annoy her in the events of the preceding evening. The whole thing seemed to have delighted her exceedingly. She was eloquent in her praises of Miss Clementson’s beauty, and prophesied that they should find her a charming acquaintance, from the striking evidence she had given in the graceful and fantastic decorations of the hall that she was not an ordinary sort of girl; “If she had been,” she added, “she would have been too much frightened, too much agitated, by the novelty of the whole thing, to have had any energy left for the invention of decorations. I like her manner too, excessively. There is such a total absence of every thing in the least degree approaching affectation. And, moreover, I think she is the very prettiest creature I ever saw, and her dancing is quite perfect!”

"Upon my word, one might take you for a young gentleman, Clara, instead of a young lady. I think she has turned *your* head, whatever may be the effect she produced upon the rest of the company," said Miss Jenkins.

"But is it not all true, aunt?" demanded Clara, settling herself to her bread-and-butter breakfast very much as if she intended to do justice to it. "Can you, with a safe conscience, deny one single syllable of all I have said?"

"No, my dear," returned Miss Jenkins, "I dare say it may be all very true; but, of course, Clara, I was looking more at you than at her. I want you to tell me if you enjoyed yourself?"

Clara Maynard was a very scrupulously true person, and she did not very well know how to answer this question. Had she said yes, her conscience would have upbraided her for saying what was not strictly the fact, and had she said no, that avowal would inevitably have been followed by a multitude of questions, which it would have been pretty nearly impossible to answer at all. And so, as many honest girls have done before her, she evaded it.

"I think, aunt, that if I had been at a great many more balls, all of them as splendid as that of

last night, I should be able to give you a more intelligible answer; but when I look back upon it, I almost feel as if I were giddy; so I will not pretend to tell you how much I liked it."

And how could Clara have given any accurate account of her feelings to her aunts, when she was at a loss to understand them herself?

Poor Clara believed, with all the undoubting singleness of perfect sincerity, that she had ceased to love Arthur Lexington. Convinced, firmly and completely convinced, that he did not love her, she had set herself to the task of becoming indifferent to him, with all the earnestness of a strong, well-regulated mind, steadfastly desirous of overcoming a feeling that could bring her nothing but unhappiness, and conscious degradation. That she had set about this in earnest, and that in earnest she thought she had succeeded, was completely proved by the pleasure she experienced from the obvious admiration of Mr. Vidal, and the unaffected gratitude with which she listened to his proposal of marriage, and accepted it. She had not, indeed, at any moment, deluded herself into the persuasion that she loved Vidal as she had loved, or could have loved, Lexington, but she admired him.

He had, when conversing with her—a manner

half playful, half grave, which led her on, often unconsciously, into very agreeable gossipings upon all she had read, and almost upon all she had thought. This was a species of enjoyment which poor Lexington had never dared to give, either to her or to himself. No sooner had he discovered that, mind and person, she was the most perfect of all imaginable women, than he grew afraid of every thing like confidential intercourse, and just when she was hoping and expecting that he would tell her she was beloved, he began to shun her society, and cautiously avoided every opportunity of conversing with her.

The contrast between his conduct towards her, and that of Mr. Vidal, could scarcely fail of touching her heart with a feeling of gratitude for the latter, for was not Vidal himself almost the idol of all around him? and this gratitude, joined to the soothing influence of adulation, after the disappointment she had endured, led to an acceptance of his vows, which was almost as prompt as his offer of them.

But poor Clara was dreadfully shocked, as she felt her eyes fill with tears while she watched Lexington during the few last minutes of his remaining in the Dalbury ball-room.

Why did he look so miserable? and why did she so earnestly long to know what ailed him? Whence arose the wild unreasonable doubts as to the indifference he had so long displayed? Was it possible! Oh, was it possible she had been mistaken? Was it possible that Lexington loved her?

But Lexington left the room, and she saw him no more.

Ashamed of her weakness, her folly, her utter inconsistency, she again strove to forget him, and so far succeeded, that she looked at the young heiress with interest and admiration. But again she reproached her secret heart bitterly for feeling that the delicate precautions of Vidal were agreeable to her, in more ways than one.

She fully approved his not wishing to render his devotion to her conspicuous, but she felt that even without this motive, the being left unnoticed at that moment would have been a relief. But Clara, was not going to let her fancy, or her memory, or whatever it was which thus affected her, so run away with her reason, as to shake her purpose of proving to Vidal through life, the steadiness of her grateful affection. So every time he came back to her from his little flirting excursions, he found her precisely in the humour he wished—smilingly pleased

to see him return, but without the least shade of reproof in her beautiful eyes on account of his long absence.

All this did very well, while it lasted, and she danced a great deal, like all the other young ladies. Only she got tired perhaps, before most of the others did. And when it was all over, she felt that it had been all very bright, and very brilliant, but she did *not* feel that she had enjoyed it. And this it was which had drawn from her the somewhat jesuitical answer which has been given above.

CHAPTER V.

THE active scheme of amusement sketched out by Vidal went on very prosperously, being well supported by the inclinations of all the parties concerned in it. To Vidal himself it produced precisely the species of existence he best loved. Throughout the whole series of these projected entertainments, there was not one which did not afford him an opportunity for display—not one which did not offer almost every thing he could wish in the way of miscellaneous love-making—nor one at which his not loudly acknowledged, but very deeply felt partiality for good breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and suppers, was not likely to be fully gratified.

Nevertheless, this state of enjoyment could not well have proceeded so prosperously, had not a con-

siderable portion of prudence and forethought been joined to his other talents.

Every body said that Mr. Vidal was to take his pheasant shooting from "The Vine." And for some time, Mr. Vidal perfectly agreed with every body, that so it would be. And he was by no means displeased, when Mr. Chatterton Springfield told him, in his lively way, that he would be a lucky fellow to get put up there; for that the Monktons, though first-rate capital people in many ways, were not famous for having staying company. He was by no means displeased at hearing this, because he greatly preferred being *the* one pet visiter in a house, to being only one among many—not to mention that Lady Sarah amused him fifty times more in a *tête-à-tête*, than when she took it into her head to show off his devotion to her, for the edification of her neighbours.

By degrees, however, he began to suspect that the defective celebrity which Mr. Chatterton Springfield had alluded to, might by possibility show itself in his case, as well as in that of others. In short it appeared to him that less was said as to his fixing a day for changing his quarters than was necessary in order to render such an arrangement convenient, not to say, possible.

Nevertheless, he by no means felt sure that Sir William might not, some day, or any day, suddenly exclaim: "Vidal! My dear fellow! When the devil are you coming to us? I swear by Jove, that if you put it off much longer, I'll set fire to 'The Oaks,' and burn you out."

Nothing seemed more likely. But yet our practical philosopher did not feel quite satisfied. The easy good-humoured hospitality of Lord and Lady Randal, indeed, ever appeared the same—or at any rate, no eye or ear, less experienced than those of Mr. Vidal himself would have perceived any difference; and such only as had gained their experience in the same way were likely to find it useful.

But certainly he did remark, that when my Lord, said to my Lady, "Have you had any letter yet from the Templetons, my dear?"—her ladyship replied rather in a muttering sort of way. "Yes—Randal, yes, I have heard from them. They are all coming I believe, and all the Brockleys too, if we can take them in."

Now as this happened to be said the very day after a rather remarkable omission on the part of Sir William Monkton, on occasion of Vidal's asking some question concerning his pheasant covers, when certainly it would have been the most natural

thing in the world for him to have pronounced the long expected, "*When the devil are you coming to us?*"—As the above-mentioned question and answer between the Lord and Lady Randal occurred the very day after Sir William might so very naturally have said this, but *did not*, Vidal mounted the horse which he had now been riding for many weeks as freely as if it had been his own, and cantered over a mile or two of cross-country road, to the pretty place called Fairy Ring, the residence of Mr. Norman. He found the amiable geologist surrounded with fossils and dust; for he was at that moment occupied in looking over a part of his collection, for the purpose of finding some particular specimen which he wished to compare with one newly-acquired.

Vidal, however, had made himself on all occasions too agreeable to the shy old man, for any occupation to prevent his receiving a very cordial reception.

"I hope I do not interrupt you, my dear sir?" said he, entering amidst the various tables that were employed for the reception of the unshelved treasures, with the animated air and roving eye of one who feels himself in the midst of all that is most

interesting in creation; "I hope I do not disturb you?"

"Not in the least, my dear sir," replied the man of science, cordially stretching out a dirty hand to welcome him. "You are not one of those from whom it is prudent to hide a love of science, as if it were a crime, or at the best a most egregious folly. You will not think the worse of me for seeing a few tables in confusion."

Vidal gracefully assured him, that he had never seen the venerable dignity of science under an aspect so amiable, so encouraging as it appeared at Fairy Ring.

"To those who know just as much, and just as little, as I do," he added, "there is generally so much diffidence mixed with the real *gusto* for the barely tasted draught, that there is often a great struggle, on meeting such a man as yourself, between the longing desire to profit by it, and the fear of being tedious and troublesome, where we would most wish to be the reverse. But with you!...."

And here Vidal stopped, being altogether overpowered by his feelings.

And then Vidal inquired, if he could assist his busy friend; and having received the necessary in-

structions as to the object sought for, he was presently mounted upon a library ladder, and exploring the higher shelves of the little museum with the most active industry, and the most lively interest.

Fortune favoured him: He found the stone he sought, and then the two friends sat down together, and Vidal, as he used his delicate Bandana to remove the dust from his fingers, looked round the room as one might fancy a man would look round Paradise, had his lucky star brought him within its precincts for an hour.

“ Shall I say that I envy you?” said he. “ No! by Heaven!” he added, fervently, “ For never was an abode so admirably fitted to its inmate. Genuine science, genial warmth, gentlemanly comfort, and an air of lettered, as well as littered ease, which precisely reaches the point at which confusion ends, and comfort begins. I will not say I envy you, for I should not do my own heart justice if I did. But I will say, that I never saw a home that I thought so every way desirable as I do yours.”

Now, every body knew that Mr. Norman, good man, was very fond of his pretty little place. He had made it entirely himself, as Vidal well knew, and therefore to compliment the house, was to compliment him. But Mr. Norman, who knew not how

well he was informed (on that, and all other points of aristocratical statistics throughout the neighbourhood), seemed to feel much pleasure in telling him all about it; and the manner in which Vidal contrived to convince him, that he never had listened to any architectural, horticultural, and upholsteric details with so much interest before, was really very clever.

“ But, alas !” said he, at length, slowly rising from his evidently much prized easy chair, “ I fear that I have little chance of seeing it again, for I suspect that my friend Randal is going to have his house full—and I cannot stand that. There is nothing on earth that I hate so much as being one of a large party, staying in a country-house.—*My* notion of a perfect *vie de château* is living in such deliciously green, quiet, enjoyment of scientific leisure as you do.”

“ I am sure I wish you would come and share it with me for a little while,” replied the fairly hooked old gentleman. “ I promise you, it is long since I have met a companion I have liked so well. Do come here, will you, Mr. Vidal, whenever you think proper to leave Lord Randal’s. I have more than one pretty room of which you may make choice. You know you did half promise me when you first

came down here And I shall be still more glad to see you now than I should have been then. Though I never give an invitation without sincerely wishing it should be accepted. But now I wish it *heartily*, as well as sincerely. Come, tell me when you think you shall be able to come to me?"

"My dear Mr. Norman," replied Vidal, his voice very perceptibly affected by his feelings; "I cannot very well express to you—I really know not how to express to you how much—how very much I feel your kindness. And if matters stood with me now, exactly as they did when you before invited me to your hospitable roof, I would accept the invitation instantly; but——"

"But me, no buts," returned the cordial inviter, "we know each other better now than we did then, and I flatter myself that there is no reason why we should be less inclined to come together."

"I flatter myself so, too, sir," replied Vidal, with a smile so affectionate, so frank, so every way expressive, that it spoke a whole volume full of amiable feelings; "I flatter myself so, too. But you must remember, my dear sir, that when you gave me that invitation, it was almost upon condition that I should make an actively industrious geological tour throughout the whole of this interest-

ing region, and make your house the place for my *pied à terre*. Could I do this *now*, I might in some degree repay your kindness to me, by being useful to you. It is possible that, during such an excursion, I might find something in our own way, you know, that might be honoured by finding a place on these dear shelves. But the fact is that at this moment such an excursion would be impossible for me. You will laugh at me, I know, and I am afraid I deserve it, but in honest truth, I am bound hand and foot, and if I do remain in the neighbourhood, I must positively fulfil all the promises I have made to be stage-manager, scene-shifter, call-boy, and I know not how many things beside, in the theatrical projects that are going on."

"Well!" cried Mr. Norman, laughing, "I do not see any great difference that need make, Vidal. Depend upon it you will find some capital specimens in the acting line, if you are obliged for a time to throw over the fossils. So you have only to name your day, and the best of all my best rooms shall be ready for you."

Having thus safely, nay, triumphantly, arrived at the goal he had in view, Mr. Vidal said every thing that was precisely the most right and proper under the circumstances, and having fixed on the

following Thursday (the present day being Monday), he set off on his return to the Oaks.

There was to be one of the *irregular* dances, which I have mentioned before, at the house of the Dowager Mrs. General Springfield on that evening, but at dinner Mr. Vidal found himself *entiers* with his noble host and hostess. The conversation went on much as usual while the dinner lasted, excepting, perhaps, that Lord Randal was not in quite such high spirits as he sometimes appeared to enjoy.

But when the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Vidal said,

“Soon after I got here, my dear lord, I found out that it was certain I must pass one painful hour under your roof. And as my dislike to this hour has increased every day I have stayed, I have made up my mind to believe that it had better be got over at once. I swear to you that I hate to say the words, but to you, my lord, and to her most kind ladyship, I must say adieu! I must leave you on Thursday next!”

“What a sudden resolution, Mr. Vidal!” exclaimed Lady Randal, smiling very sweetly, and not looking by many degrees as much in danger of weeping, as Mr. Vidal did himself.

But the truth was, as my hero had truly divined, his bed-room was wanted; for they were particularly desirous of receiving at that time three married couples, and as all the ladies were to bring their own maids, and all the gentlemen their own men, and as, moreover, Randal Oaks was less abounding in bed-rooms than its hospitable owners could have wished, the tidings which now reached them of the restoration of one which had been occupied *rather* longer than they had expected, was certainly not disagreeable. Nevertheless, they were still both of them ready to acknowledge as promptly now, as on the first day of his arrival, that Mr. Vidal was a man of the most versatile and extraordinary talents, and decidedly a most delightful acquisition at a house in the country.

Only, unless one's house was very large indeed, it never was convenient for any body, let them be ever so delightful, to stay beyond a certain time.

Vidal understood all this quite as well as his hosts. Nay, he understood all the intricacies of the important science of going and coming, a great deal better. Nor is this at all extraordinary, for it was a matter of infinitely greater importance to him, than to them. The difference, indeed, of the comparative importance of this study to such visit-

ers as Mr. Vidal, and to those on whom his visits were bestowed, was as great as that between the management of a man's revenues and estates, and the sending out a card of invitation to dinner.

Rarely had this accomplished stayer-out so far transgressed the laws by which he guided his progresses from house to house, as in this instance. His code, as far as it related to what may be called the *common-law* in such matters, was as simple as it was absolute. Namely, never to accept an invitation (unless one of very great importance indeed), till just enough of the bob-cherry sort of tactics had been gone through, to render his permitting himself to be caught at last, a matter of triumph and rejoicing. And never to delay his departure long enough to prevent a feeling of sorrowful surprise and disappointment, from following his announcement of it.

With his versatility of drawing and dining-room usefulness, it was by no means difficult to manage this. It was only necessary to set some scheme on foot, to the success of which his presence was particularly essential, and then to receive a mandate by the post, which rendered his immediate departure inevitable.

But there were many special and more complicated

laws which, though of less universal application, were scarcely less important to him. To record all these would be quite impossible, but one or two specimens may be given that may, perhaps, suffice to give a tolerably correct general idea of his system.

To an individual not highly placed in respect to either rank or fortune, an admittance into such society as Vidal aimed at and obtained, is not to be achieved without some care and skill. But the manner in which it was his purpose to turn this society to account, was an affair not only of greater difficulty, but of infinitely greater importance than the mere ordinary matter of getting invited to dinners and balls.

Vidal's income was exactly three hundred and fifty pounds per annum, and with this income he determined to enjoy all the luxuries, all the refinements, and all the graces of life. And let his historian's assurance that he had done so during the last fifteen years of his existence, be accepted as a sufficient reason for his being selected as a hero.

It was not, however possible, or, at any rate, it was not easy for Mister Vidal (father and mother utterly unknown) to find constant quarters in the mansions of the highest aristocracy during the earlier portion of his very successful career, and he was,

therefore, occasionally obliged to submit to receive his venison and claret, his Perigord and his Champagne, from plebeian hands.

This he submitted to, but it was not without conditions. For instance, when introduced into a family who were benevolently scattering their new-born wealth upon those who obligingly took a little backward or downward step in order to receive it, he skilfully won an assured welcome there by permitting his name to be freely enrolled among those who fearlessly spent weeks and weeks with them in the country (*bien entendu* that the kitchen, cellar, and stables, were respectable). Nay, he showed himself with unshrinking courage at their tables, and even at their balls, in town. But if the degree of familiarity thus generously permitted, ever transgressed the limits which he thought proper to allow, he drew up the offender instantly.

And this system, rigorously attended to, enabled him to fill sundry gaps in his yearly circle of migrations, without running any risk of degradation.

Another point on which he regulated his mode of existence with extraordinary skill and success, was his love affairs. The manner in which he contrived

to avoid committing himself with fathers, mothers, and brothers, while appropriating to himself the tender hearts of unnumbered maidens, was perfectly extraordinary; nor was the high-bred caution with which he protected the fame of the married ladies, whose admirable qualities contributed to charm his existence, less worthy of admiration—while all the fair creatures themselves, whether married or single, all, all acquitted him of the baseness and falsehood which must perforce have been attributed to a less skilful practitioner. But they were severally convinced, every one of them, firmly, immovably convinced that Vidal *really* loved nobody but herself.

The unmarried ladies were quite sure that poor dear Vidal had some horrible entanglement, which made it impossible for him to propose; while the married ones blessed him in their hearts for his apparent inconstancy, knowing as they did (dear fellow!) that his first and dearest care was to guard them from even the shadow of imputed impropriety.

This may appear rather a long digression; but it is no good to have a hero, unless one may take the liberty of accurately developing his character.

To return, however, to Mr. Vidal's long visit at the Oaks. He knew perfectly well that it had

been too long, but he knew also that he had his reasons for making it so. It was necessary, before he actually married his divine Clara, that he should thoroughly understand every thing about her—every thing about the Town Head House, and the amount of the income which was to descend with it to his future wife. And how was this to be achieved, unless he contrived to remain long enough in the neighbourhood to gather together all that was to be learned concerning her, and her belongings?

Should he take a lodging in the market town of Compton? Merciful, sweet Heaven! Theodore Vidal in lodgings in a market town! He could have easier done a worser deed, ay, and a good many of them.

Better was it, then, far better to run the risk of staying, for once in his life, a little longer than he was expected to do, than either to leave his object unachieved, or submit to such very hateful degradation in order to obtain it.

Beyond all question he had reasoned both wisely and well in this matter, for not only had he acquired all the information that it was at all important for him to obtain respecting the connexions and the probable fortune of Miss Maynard, but he had done

so without incurring any important injury in the valued (and valuable) esteem of his new and noble friends.

“Are you really obliged to go?” said Lady Randal, in the kindest tone imaginable.

“Really and truly, dear lady,” replied Vidal, pressing his broad chest, that seat of honour, with his hand.

“But you are not going to leave the neighbourhood, Vidal, are you?” said Lord Randal, pushing the claret towards him. “I know that there are plenty of people wanting to snatch you away from us the instant we *let go*, and I hope, in common charity to all the ladies, that you will suffer yourself to be caught by some one, or what is to become of the theatrical scheme? And Lady Sarah’s fancy ball? And the classical tableaux that the Springfields are going to get up? I am sure I have heard at least a dozen ladies declare that you were going to sketch costumes for them.”

“I know it, my dear lord,” returned Vidal, playfully. “I know all the duties which, as your faithful slave and vassal, I have suffered to be thrown upon me; nor do I intend to desert them. But time, you know, my lord, waits for no man. I have but a moderate portion left to devote to this

delightful region, and, therefore, I must continue to squeeze the performance of the duties enumerated to your lordship, and the visit I have promised to my good friend Mr. Norman, into the same period."

"There is comfort in that, at any rate," said Lady Randal, smiling upon him very kindly; "and as long as you do stay in the neighbourhood, you must promise to let us see as much of you as possible. We have some friends coming to stay with us, to whom I should very much like to present you."

And this was said quite sincerely, although her ladyship rose as she spoke, and left the dining-room, mounting immediately to her own apartments, and ringing the housekeeper's bell, notwithstanding the strangeness of the hour for such a summons, in order to inform her that the green room would be vacant on Thursday, and that she was to have a pair of clean muslin curtains ready to put up at a moment's warning, that it might be ready for Mr. Sinclair and Lady Emily when they arrived, which would be by dressing time the same day.

It was before this eventful Thursday that the first dinner party at Dalbury Park, at which Mary had ever presided, was to take place.

It was to consist of Lord and Lady Randal, Sir

William and Lady Sarah Monkton, Mr. Norman, Mr. Chatterton Springfield, and the whole of the family at Dalbury, it having been settled between Mary and her father, during one of the sacred shaving hours, that the two governesses were to be admitted, now and always, as long as it should be thought desirable to retain them.

Nay, Mary confessed to her father, that not only should she greatly prefer their being present at table, but that it would be much more agreeable to her if Mrs. Morris might be permitted to preside at the dinner-table; but to this proposal he replied with rather more gravity than usual: "No, Mary, you have not, I think, been brought at all too early into society; and if you appear in my house at all, it must be as the mistress of it.

There was something a little solemn in these words, and Mary listened to them as if half frightened. But she looked half pleased, too, and she got up and kissed her father, with a feeling of mingled timidity and gratitude that was very engaging. "My dear papa!" she said, "I wish I could believe that I should ever be quite, quite deserving of all your dear kindness to me, in all ways."

"If you are all that I wish you to be, Mary, I suppose that will do, wont it?" said he; and then

followed a very business-like discussion respecting the dinner, and the leading out to dinner, and sundry other particulars, which Mary was quite as eager to learn as the squire to teach.

“I dare say, my dear,” he said, looking rather archly in her face, “if you could have your way, you would like to be taken out by Mr. Vidal?”

“Most certainly I should, papa,” replied the young *débûtante*, laughing a little, and blushing a good deal; “for I am quite sure nobody else would be so entertaining. But you must not suppose that our two old ladies have left me so ignorant as that. *You* must have Lady Randal, and *I* must have Lord Randal; and—let me see—Mr. Norman must take Lady Sarah; and Sir William must take—oh! good gracious, papa! who must Sir William take? He is so very gay-looking, and so very handsome, that I do not think he will like dear good Mrs. Morris at all. I dare say he would like to take Lucy a great deal better. What do you think about it?”

“Why I think, Mary,” he replied, “that as our domestic circle is rather an awkward one for ceremonious arrangements, the best plan will be not to attempt making any. *I* think, that just at present it is advantageous for you to have the society of

your very estimable and very lady-like instructors ; and *you* think, that it is agreeable for you to have that of your old play-fellow, Lucy ; and as these considerations are decidedly more important to us, than the likings or dislikings of our casual company, in the matter of who and who go out together to dinner, my opinion is, that we had better leave the matter to chance. As far as who I shall take out, and who shall take out you, it will be always easy enough to arrange. And all we can do besides, is to take care that there shall be a well-spread table, and good wine. I think we may trust to the old house-keeper for the first, and to my good friend Mr. Williamson, the wine-merchant, for the second ; and unless things are greatly changed since my gay days, Mary, that will suffice to obtain a good deal of toleration on the score of our old ladies. And then, you know, we are going to have the beautiful Clara, and her aunts, the Springfield womankind, the new curate and his smart military brother in the evening ; and then you may all waltz away again, to your hearts' content."

"I dare say it will all do very well, papa. But will you tell me why you did not ask the beautiful Clara, as you justly call her, to dinner ? Every body would have liked that, I should think."

“And what would her aunts have thought of it, Madam Dalbury? I am sorry to say it, but I am afraid your question looks rather young, Miss Mary. If you intend seriously to commence your studies in the dinner-giving line, it will be desirable to impress upon your youthful mind the necessity, in the first place, of not picking out your pretty young neighbours, and leaving the ugly old ones at home; and in the second, that you must never sit down to table, if you can help it, without an equal number of ladies and gentlemen. So now, my dear, if you will count on your pretty little fingers, you will find, that by the aid of Mr. Norman, Mr. Vidal, and our cousin Richard, we contrive to obey this important law, notwithstanding the two governesses, and the companion. And thereby you may also be enabled to discover, that it would have been very lamentably transgressed, if the beautiful Clara and her *cortège* of aunts had been admitted.”

Mary promised to be more observant of arithmetical proportion for the future, and prepared herself for this new trial in the art of presiding, with all the courage she could muster.

CHAPTER VI.

It must be presumed, I think, that there *was* something a little approaching to old-fashioned display and magnificence in the style of the squire's dining-room and its appurtenances; for though this inference does not necessarily follow upon the statement of Richard Herbert's being struck by the splendour of the plate, and so forth, it is less easy to avoid it, when historic truth obliges me to declare that the elegant, and somewhat *blazé* Mr. Vidal, was a good deal struck with it too. Mr. Vidal, however, was perfectly right in feeling that the ball at which he had been present, at Dalbury Park, splendid as it really was, did not, and could not, from the high-pressure nature of the entertainment, furnish as good an opportunity of forming an accurate judgment of the station and fortune of the Clementson

race, as the dinner to which he was invited, while still the guest of Lord Randal.

Few men of thirty-seven years old had eaten more company dinners than Mr. Vidal, and of these a large proportion had decidedly been of rather a high order. Therefore, when it is stated that he left the squire's dining-room with a strong impression that he must be the possessor of a much larger revenue than he had attributed to him, it follows that the dinner and its appurtenances *were* splendid.

But here it must be observed, in order that Mr. Vidal's state of mind may be perfectly understood, that he was not by any means the sort of person which we denominate a fortune-hunter. A good many years before the date of this narrative he had made two attempts to place himself in an easy chair for life, by means of a rich wife. But in both cases his addresses were rejected, and often had he since rejoiced at their failures. His love for luxury speedily overpowered his love of money, though it increased his value for it, and he became persuaded that to a man so delicately organised as himself, the necessity of enduring through life the presence of an ugly woman, could not be compensated by the consciousness of possessing a few thousands per annum (encumbered, too, with settlements).

He was too acute a looker-on upon life to think it likely that he should obtain youth, beauty, and wealth, nor was he slow to remark that nothing was more likely to throw a man out of good society than the idea of his getting into it for the sake of picking up a rich wife. All these considerations together had sufficed to deter him from any systematic attempts to make his fortune by marriage. This it was which had prevented him, ever since his arrival in the neighbourhood, from listening with any very particular attention or interest to the gossippings of which Mary was the heroine.

He knew that she was very young, was considered very pretty, and proclaimed an heiress; and perfectly sympathising with the wise man who said or sang:

“ But if she be not for me
What care I how fair she be ?”

he probably felt less interest on the subject than any other individual who had seen her.

But there was something in the manner of both father and daughter, during this dinner visit, which set his imagination at work in a manner that confounded all his present plans, projects, hopes, and intentions. In the first place, the dining-room and the dining-table at Dalbury were precisely such a dining-room and such a dining-table as (he confessed

it to his heart) he should like to preside over till his dying day.

And then Mary, and the absolute necessity of marrying her, by which this privilege could alone be obtained. Was this a condition from which any man could start in dismay? He looked steadily at her, and his conscience answered, NO.

But above all, was it not evident that both the father and daughter were as completely separate and apart from all ordinary mortals as if they had dropped from the moon? He knew as well as every body else; and how could he help it, since it was not only the common but the universal theme, that it was at her own ball she had first been seen, had first tasted the delicious cup of adulation. He hardly remembered what he had said to her on that occasion, or on any subsequent one which had brought them together. But, of course, he knew that he must have made as much love to her as circumstances rendered convenient, because he always did so to all pretty women.

But he did remember that she waltzed well, and he was quite aware that whenever this was the case with his partner, he, too, waltzed well. Well? he knew that he then always waltzed better than any other man in the room, let that room be where it might.

The acquaintance between them had gone no further. But what had appeared nothing to him might have appeared a great deal to her. He knew this was likely, and he soon began to think it was certain.

Let the mistress of a house be what she may, it is *almost* impossible not to pay her some sort of attention; the degree, of course, varying according to the strength of the duty principle in the guest, and the attractive or repulsive qualities of the hostess.

This species of duty principle always acted powerfully upon Vidal, as may easily be supposed from his peculiar mode of life; and from the same cause not only his duty but his inclination was easily prompted to take the same direction. It need scarcely be said, therefore, that he was not deficient in his attentions now.

There is a prodigious difference between one man and another, in the way in which the wish and the purpose of being attentive is carried out. Of a dozen gentlemen who may all have an equally strong desire to be both civil and agreeable, not half the number know how to set about it. Many men have not courage enough to be agreeable, or even sufficient presence of mind to be civil. But Mr. Vidal was not one of them. While others were thinking

about the business he was performing it; and by the time the slower machines had got under weigh, the *lady* was too much occupied in listening to him to have much notice left for any one else. Nothing, indeed, could be more graceful or perfectly as it ought to be, than the manner in which my hero treated the fair young mistress of Dalbury Park. He was not blind to the fact that the large, melting blue eyes of Lucy were often, oh very often, fixed upon him; but this interfered in no degree with his amiable devotion to his little hostess; he knew he was in no danger of losing ground with his "beautiful sultana," as he called her, both because with one half glance in return his eyes knew how to answer to all hers said, and because he trusted fearlessly to his skill for finding opportunities enough before the evening was over of convincing her that he was not ungrateful.

All this was very well; but all this was in the common course of things, and Vidal began to fancy before the evening was half over that there was something out of the common course of things in the peculiar kindness of Mr. Clementson's manner to him. What made this the more remarkable, was the fact that Mr. Clementson was not a sort of person to be suddenly captivated by his conver-

sational talents in the way that Lord Randal had been, Mr. Vidal saw this very plainly, and it puzzled him.

Why was he so particularly attentive to him after the ladies left the dining-room? Not indeed by attempting to draw him into conversation, for the squire was intent upon listening to some chemical details which Mr. Norman was giving him relative to agriculture, but by selecting for him every thing most dainty and most rare amidst the dessert, by pressing him to say what sort of claret he preferred, and by ringing to order that some orange leaves should be immediately gathered and brought in for the finger-glasses, because he happened to hear Vidal tell Sir William Monkton that the rubbing his fingers upon fresh orange leaves after dinner was one of the Italian luxuries that he most missed upon his returning to England.

Was it from some old-fashioned notion of what was due to a stranger? It might be so; and it was with this impression that he entered the drawing-room; but here he became more puzzled than ever to account for the old gentleman's manner to him. He observed, that while he was talking and laughing with Mary, Mr. Clementson's bright keen eye was

fixed upon them both, and with a manner so evidently scrutinising, as must have inevitably suggested the idea that he was keeping a sharp lookout over his heiress, had not his countenance, at the same time, expressed a degree of cordial contentment that rendered it impossible to suppose he was displeased.

“Has he heard, or dreamed, some wonderful romance representing me as a man of fortune?” thought he. “A perfectly high-bred, and thoroughly aristocratic bearing, may, certainly, lead to such a delusion, but this squire of Dalbury and his bright-eyed daughter need not snatch at a shadow, when substance and shadow both might so easily be found at their service.”

It was thus Vidal reasoned—and the more he meditated, the more puzzled he became. In truth this sensation became sufficiently strong to be troublesome, and he, therefore, resolutely determined to shake it off, for the present at least, and to enjoy, without let or hindrance, the pleasures of the hour.

The party was a small one, and the place wherein they were met, an old-fashioned country house. Yet Vidal felt, nevertheless, that much of what he considered as essential to enjoyment was collected

there. A large and lofty room, richly hung, richly carpeted, and perfectly well lighted, abundance of sweet-scented flowers—a moderately bright autumn fire—coffee that, without danger of disappointment, permitted the dismissal of the cream-jug—a harp; and a grand pianoforte, which, being opened, with candles properly placed, spoke of melodious intentions—and to crown all, a few (but quite enough) very pretty women, every one of whom he had the satisfaction of believing would prefer his approach to that of any other person present.

As to the elegant Lady Sarah, he might by this time have found some embarrassment in meeting her, not only in the presence of Miss Maynard, but in that of every other pretty woman, had he not assured her in the most solemn and touching manner, that he *dare not* approach her in company.

“There may be men,” said he; “indeed I believe there are many such, who adore, even as I adore, but who, nevertheless, retain the power of concealing what they feel—*I have it not!*—and how, while your eternal cruelty tortures my heart, how can I approach you, all heavenly, lovely as you are, and retain such an aspect of composure as my miserable position renders necessary!”

This answered perfectly, and even while her be-

witchingly-attired ladyship sat apart, while he was making his quietly passionate love to one or two others, she amused herself tolerably well till the waltzing began, by remembering his words, and inwardly whispered as she settled her bracelets, or arranged her brooch: "Poor dear Vidal!—I am sure I am very sorry for him—I did not intend to make him suffer so deeply: but really he ought to know better!"

Ere long, the evening party arrived, and Mrs. Morris and Mademoiselle Panache, one from the piano, and the other from the harp, sent forth such provoking notes, that chairs and tables vanished into corners, as if by magic, and six pair of waltzers commenced their evolutions with every possible symptom of being extremely well pleased with what they were about.

And then a skilful and experienced eye might have watched the manœuvrings of the accomplished Vidal with great satisfaction. Did Lady Sarah find herself *too* much avoided?—No.

Did Lady Randal discover, that her parting guest was less assiduous than the newly-arrived one had been?—No.

And Mary? Was not Mary still ready to avow that of all the dancers in the world, she was quite

convinced Mr. Vidal must be the best, as well as a thousand times the most agreeable ?—Oh ! yes.

And Clara ?—his beloved, his affianced beauty. Did she perceive, or hear any thing to give her pain ?—Oh ! no. Or if she did, it was only when the tender, the ardent, but delicately cautious Theodore, demonstrated during the moments that he permitted himself to devote to her, a greater depth of passionate love than she found herself capable of returning.

And how went it with Lucy ? The lowly-born, the dependent, the penniless Lucy had cause to triumph, for the only being in that company with whose feelings the ambitious, the haughty, the highly-distinguished Vidal really sympathised, was herself ; and she knew *this*, as well as much else concerning him. The sentiments he had inspired in her were of that vehement class which seize upon the whole being of their victim, and render every faculty subservient to themselves. From the night of the Dalbury ball, Lucy Dalton might truly be said to have had no thought, no feeling unconnected with him.

She had read of love a good deal ; for not only was there a large old library at Dalbury Park, but its master had a current account with his London bookseller, to which both the governesses were per-

mitted to add by ordering whatever books they pleased. And while all that was written upon agriculture and agricultural chemistry, was sure to reach the squire, and all that was most notable in modern English literature obeyed the summons of Mrs. Morris, the rather promiscuous orders of Mademoiselle Panache brought to the shades of Dalbury a good many volumes, the product of sadly perverted French genius, which, if they got there at all, ought to have been kept more sacred to her own private use, than they were.

From all such mischief the young heiress was happily protected by the frequent repetition of the truly parental question, "What have you been reading, Mary?" which question being constantly heard by the "old ladies," very sufficient care was taken to make the answer satisfactory.

But no such restraint was imposed on Lucy. In fact, no degree of restraint would have been effectual with her, which did not render the obtaining what she wished to get at, impossible; for whereas a desk, or a drawer appropriated to the use of any individual, was as sacred in the eyes of Mary, if left wide open, as if a hundred locks had secured it; the case was otherwise with respect to Lucy.

And be pleased to observe, gentle reader, that

instead of attributing illiberality to the pen which records this difference between the young lady, and the young lady's humble companion, it might be more useful, as well as more just, to look about a little, and see if such an imputation be the result of prejudice, or of observation. The wider and the deeper such investigation be carried, the more hideously prominent will appear the sin of suffering *any* of our fellow-creatures to remain uneducated, and the responsibility becomes more fearful still if the examination goes deep enough to prove (as prove it may), that there is an education of *race*, as well as of *individuals* necessary, before *low-class faults* can be sufficiently eradicated to prevent our (rationally) expecting to find them among what are carelessly called—but, alas! very carefully made—*low-class people*.

No error, perhaps, can be more fundamentally unphilosophical than that which leads people to suppose that they are giving a sufficient moral education to those whom the accidents of existence have placed in their power, by making them learn by rote certain laws regarding honesty of thought, word, and deed;—laws, which in the poor man's case, it often requires the very noblest and most arduous self-denial to put in practice; while to others,

more fortunately situated, it is (as Hamlet says) as "easy as lying."

The human animal must be brought to a much higher state of perfection than it has reached at present, before the promulgation of the simple law, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL, shall suffice for the protection of property.

There stands the law, divine in its simplicity, divine from its authority; and it is the business of those to whom it has been given, not only to understand it, but to prepare their hearts to practise it.

This has *effectually* been done by education. *The highly educated do not steal* (accidental deformities have nothing to do with the classification of a species), and this fact ought of itself to be sufficient to prove the fearful atrocity of the sin which would refuse education, to the largest possible extent, to all.

It would be a vain and idle cavil to say, that the highly-born, highly-bred, highly-educated classes do not steal, only because they do not much want what they could get by doing so. Let all such, after the solemn secrecy of self-examination, declare if any such calculation mixes itself with the species of instinctive repugnance with which the idea of such a sin inspires them.

The contemplation of it, as a *crime*, will not, as we know right well, suffice to prevent its being committed. Stripes, imprisonment, exile, nay, death itself, have been freely tried, and tried in vain. Education, alone, enlightened, liberal, high-toned, moral, and religious education is the only means on earth by which men can be made honest and honourable. And an individual taken from a race, which from generation to generation has remained without this species of education, has not a fair chance, when placed side-by-side with an individual taken from a race, which from generation to generation has had all its faculties, its qualities, its very organisation, exposed to its effects.

Philosophers are fond of analogy. Let them look at a thorough-bred pointer puppy, almost immediately after its individual education has commenced, and then at one of the same species, but who has an educational blot on its escutcheon. They will perceive, that there is more in race than a name.

The bright facility with which some very few natures catch information, and acquire much that is familiarly known by the name of accomplishment, is far from impugning the truth of this doctrine. The importance of it only appears the greater. The benefit of enlarged hereditary education might

fairly be challenged if its result were only a universal development of talent (which must often demand the neglect of the labour that gains daily bread), but no man dare raise his voice against it, if the highest moral attributes are found to be improved thereby. Poverty, and the needful labour that attends it, offers no impediment here, but rather ensures a much more perfect success; for that wealth brings temptation to some crimes, though not to all, is very certain, and a highly educated poor man is much more likely to be free from sin, than a highly educated rich one. Thereby giving an excellent commentary upon the psalm, that says, "*Sure I am that the Lord will avenge the poor, and maintain the cause of the helpless.*"

But it is high time to return to Lucy, who, though she had cleverly enough picked up a considerable number of showy acquirements, could read, and even speak French fluently, sing a very tolerably true second in a duet, and dance almost as well as Mademoiselle Panache herself, would, nevertheless, look into either a letter, or a drawer, if they came in her way, and would have had no sort of moral objection to applying her rather long ear to the keyhole of a door, if she fancied it might serve her purpose to do so.

And by such means, Lucy had made herself mistress of a good deal of French literature, all very clever, but not perhaps particularly salutary to the youthful female mind. Whence it follows, that Lucy had read a good deal of, and concerning, love.

She did not, therefore, feel at all at a loss to understand her own sensations, when on retiring to her room that night, and looking at her own impassioned eyes in the glass, she had sworn, that engaged, or disengaged, married, or single, with his own good-will, or in spite of it, he should love her, even as she loved him.

Upon this vow she slept, and with this resolution she awoke. A taste for solitude seized upon her, which she gratified, and accounted for, by pleading almost incessant headaches. She confessed, that the complaint must be entirely nervous, however, because the excitement produced by every new engagement so completely cured it for the time. And when Mrs. Morris kindly reasoned with her upon the necessity of not yielding to a malady which appeared to have so much of fancy in it, she replied, gently, that she doubted not but that in a little time she should be able to struggle with it effectually; that it was only the result of the strong emotion she had experienced on hearing

of the generous intentions of her benefactress respecting her, and that if she were permitted to indulge in solitude for a little while, she should speedily cease to require it.

And she was indulged in it, and sometimes for hours together she would wander along the woodcutters' and game-keepers' paths, in the venerable wood of oak and beech which stretched away for about a mile beyond the grazing portion of the park.

A little of the uninterrupted leisure thus attained was spent less sublimely, but in equal accordance with the all-absorbing influence of the passion which had seized upon her. It was necessary that she should know all that it was possible for her to learn respecting Vidal. And in this respect she found considerable advantage from being the daughter of her mother ; for, by her means, she obtained a private interview with the notable body who took in all the company washing from the Oaks. From her she learned, that Mr. Vidal had no servant with him, that his linen was all very fine and nice, only some of it a good deal mended.

This was enough ; Lucy required no further data on that point ; it was clear that Vidal was a poor man. And then came as deliberative a questioning

with herself as to whether she should marry him—as if she had received a written, signed, and sealed offer of his hand.

Lucy Dalton had as great confidence in her own powers, as Mr. Vidal himself. The question, therefore, was not at that moment whether she *could* marry him, but whether she *should* marry him. She was, indeed, strongly persuaded, that he *had* been in love with Miss Maynard, and that he *was* now affianced to her; but this persuasion made not the slightest difference either in her wishes or intentions. Lucy had not only confidence in herself, she had also confidence unbounded in the power of passion.

“He will love me! He **SHALL** love me!” she murmured to the oaks above, and the fern beneath her—or it may be that her unholy vows went higher, and went lower too. “But shall I marry him?” She evidently considered this point as more doubtful.

She loathed the name, the thought of poverty, as much as she idolized him, and it was while weighing one against the other, that the lights acquired by her Gallic studies, broke in upon her in a practical, and, as she thought it, a profitable shape.

“Marry him?” she whispered to her oaks and her fern. “Marry?—What is there in marriage that has aught to do with him and me? If he be, as I suspect, in the same situation as in something approaching the same situation as myself, what can marriage do for us but check and chill, if any human device can do it, the heaven-born ardour of our mutual love? Let him wed money on his side, and let me wed money on mine, and then we may meet again, not hand to hand, but heart to heart, and laugh at the feeble attempts of fortune to divide us. Whatever the old-fashioned benighted bigots may teach here, there are happier lands within reach, where the heart may assert its rights, despite all the prejudices in the world!”

And then would follow a long, grave, silent meditation on the probable resources of the young lieutenant—he being the only one who had yet crossed her path from whom she could be said to *expect* an offer of marriage. From him she certainly did expect it, and fully believed that it depended wholly on herself to hasten, or retard it.

And the young lady certainly had reason to suspect that the young gentleman admired her; and admire her, he did. And it would have been very strange if he had not, for, in her particular

style, she was very beautiful, and in all her intercourse with him she had been as sweetly gentle, as winningly mild, as she was brightly fair.

She had not, indeed, given him such looks from her full languishing blue eyes as she had bestowed upon the favoured Vidal. She knew better, and it was by no means the difference which marked her respective feelings for them, which occasioned *all* the difference in her manner of treating them.

There is a free-masonry between sympathetic natures of all kinds, which teaches those who are apparently almost strangers to each other, that they may venture to exchange signs.

But if there was nothing in Richard Herbert to attract such eye-beams as were bestowed on Vidal, there was enough to make it very probable that it might be worth while to throw a net over him of sufficient strength to keep him in readiness in case he might be wanted.

He had been both drawn and driven towards her in a manner to make this sort of entangling by no means difficult. He had been drawn by her beauty, her meekness, and her gentle kindness. He had been driven by the proud fear that his wealthy cousin might suspect him of designs upon the heart of his heiress daughter, a supposition so repugnant

to his nature, that he would have sacrificed all his very deepest and strongest feelings, rather than have exposed himself to it.

And between these two influences he had indeed *almost* made love to Lucy. Sailors, when they are not married men, always do make love, and there was too much in Richard's present situation, to lead to the doing so, for it to be reasonably expected that he should avoid it. In short, he made quite enough love to satisfy Lucy that he might be easily brought to make more.

But first it was necessary to learn whether her own liberal tone of thought on such matters agreed with the notions of the man she loved; and it was also necessary that she should ascertain whether the actual possessions, and the future prospects of young Herbert, could justify her in at once selecting him as the honoured mortal who should call her wife, after the manner of the multitude of excellent high minded gentlemen, whose conduct in the capacity of husband her favourite studies had taught her to appreciate so highly.

As to the first question, she had, to say truth, very little doubt about it. The same sort of free-masonry, which has been before alluded to, helped her to solve it greatly to her satisfaction; and con-

cerning the last, she soon contrived to discover from a few innocent little questions thrown out to Mary, that cousin Richard had only two or three hundred a year, independent of his profession, but that she was quite sure her dear papa would never suffer so excellent a person, who was his own first cousin's son, to want what would be sufficient to ensure him a comfortable independence.

“Now, then,” thought Lucy, after having proceeded thus far in her investigations, “now then, I know my ground; and the next thing to be done is the contriving to arrange such an interview with Vidal as may enable me to judge whether his thoughts and mine, are as accordant as I believe them to be.”

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

THE waltzing which followed the dinner party at Dalbury Park went on merrily till midnight, and then came fruits, and ice, and wine, and then the gentle farewells.

But a good deal of business had been done, before this parting moment arrived.

In the first place, a select committee of the whole dramatic corps were invited to meet at Lord Randal's for the despatch of business on the next day but one. This corps consisted of Sir William Monkton, Vidal, Chatterton Springfield, Richard Herbert, and Mr. Evans, the young military brother of the curate, the ladies being Lady Randal, Miss Clementson, the two Miss Springfields, and Lucy Dalton.

Great efforts had been made to induce Clara to join the party, and she would have been willing to

to do so, had it not become evident to her in the course of the discussion, that Mr. Vidal did not wish it. She attributed this to the sensitive delicacy of his feelings as a lover; which, though she could not suspect them to arise from jealousy—for Vidal had told her that it was not in his nature to be jealous of any man—yet feelings of averseness to so much display might very well exist, she thought, without any mixture of jealousy at all. So she was steady in her refusal, and, with the exception of the self-forgetting little heiress, the ladies of the corps were not perhaps very sorry for it.

As to Vidal, he would have so well liked to see the beauty he meant to appropriate displayed to the admiring gaze of the whole neighbourhood, that far from objecting, he would have greatly encouraged it, had he not been quite aware, that her constant presence at all the consultations, and all the rehearsals, would have been a restraint and an inconvenience to him. He therefore looked at her with fond beseeching eyes, when the question was under discussion, and speedily settled it, by whispering in her ear, "No, dearest, no!"

His good star favoured him also, as he ever felt confident it would do upon all occasions, by the Lady Sarah Monkton's also declining to exert any

of her charming talents in so very fatiguing an affair.

This was a great relief to Vidal. The flirting with Lady Sarah was no sinecure, for she was most exceedingly *exigeante*, and it must be confessed, that from the time my hero became convinced that except an occasional dinner, which, notwithstanding its faithful mimicry of continental peculiarities in the manner of setting out the table, carving, and so forth, was as far inferior to the most unceremonious banquet he had ever partaken at the table of Lord Randal, as *chicorée* to coffee, from the time that Mr. Vidal discovered such dinners to be the end all of the largely promising Monkton hospitality, the diffidence with which he abstained from intruding too much on Sir William's elegant leisure had greatly increased, and his devotion to Lady Sarah had gently begun to assume the character of hopeless respect.

Had it not been for his vehement passion for display, Mr. Vidal would, in fact, have felt but little interest in this theatrical scheme, for he had no particular object to gain by it. But after this first dinner-party at Mr. Clementson's, he began, he hardly knew why, to like the project better, and said a good deal to Mary before they parted, upon the necessity of her being very punctual at the meeting about to take place at Lord Randal's.

Mary, as eagerly delighted by this scheme as by all the other charming novelties which now embellished her existence, listened to him with the most earnest attention; and blushed, and smiled, and promised obedience with so much animation, and such an evident air of happy excitement, that her father, whose eye was upon her, became convinced that Vidal was exactly the sort of man (as he could not have Richard Herbert) to suit him for a son-in-law.

“I must inquire more about him,” thought he, “if it turns out that he has no fine place a hundred miles off to take her to, he may find that the falling in love with my Mary, was the luckiest thing that ever happened to him.”

But though this idea of good Mr. Clementson's was by no means one of light importance, and though there were also some new-born notions floating through the brain of Mr. Vidal, which were not quite unimportant either, neither the one nor the other could be said to be conscious of any feeling at all, when compared to Lucy.

She was about to study a part with Vidal! Nothing was finally settled, but it seemed very likely, from what had fallen both from Sir William Monkton and Mr. Chatterton Springfield, that if they played the little piece (translated from Scribe,) of

which they had been talking, *she* would have to sustain the part of the heroine, because the heroine was tall, and she alone, of all the ladies engaged in the project, possessed the pre-eminence of stature which the character evidently required. Oh! how she blessed the cold reserve of Clara, which, as she supposed, had led her to decline joining them!

That Vidal would have the first male part assigned to him, there could, of course, be no doubt. And thus——! The rush of emotion which followed upon these premises, almost overwhelmed her. The subject was changed; she felt that she could obtain no more information, and she eagerly exchanged the heat of the room where they had been dancing, for the refreshing coolness of the large and lofty hall. At first she paced its marble floor with no object but to still the throbbings of her temples, no wish but to conceal all the new and vehement emotions that assailed her heart. But as she recovered from the palpitating sort of agitation produced by the but newly-conceived idea that she should have to rehearse and to act several very tender love scenes with Vidal, she began to fear that her love might become visible to other eyes than his, and to think that if the intercourse between them when off the stage, were for ever to be

restricted to the dumb (though elegant) by-play by which alone they had hitherto exchanged something like an avowal of their mutual sentiments, the more openly expressed feelings that were to be uttered on the stage, would have more of torture than delight.

That she had read the heart of Vidal, and had read it right, she could not doubt. Nor was it possible that he could have failed in reading hers. And if not, if he already knew that she adored him, what reason was there why she should not, before losing sight of him this night, contrive to establish such an understanding between them, as should render all their future meetings delicious to themselves, though the feelings which would make them so, should be wrapped in clouds and darkness to others?

Lucy Dalton still wanted two or three months of eighteen; but, nevertheless, she had been for more than four years in the constant daily habit of passing a late and early hour or two

“Over the pages of some dear romance.”

And as the romance was always French, and, for the most part, of the most dangerous kind, those who have watched the effects of such studies on a

mind constituted like that of Lucy Dalton, will not be inclined to pronounce either her feelings or her conduct improbable.

A few more turns up and down Mr. Clementson's great hall, sufficed to settle her purpose, and as soon as she felt that it *was* settled, she re-entered the drawing-room. She had no longer any reason to fear that she should betray any feeling she wished to conceal. There was no longer any danger of it. She knew what she intended to do, and she knew perfectly well that she was capable of doing it.

Wine and water, biscuits and fruit, were placed at one of the tables. The ladies, save Lucy, were all seated; the gentlemen all standing round this table, for the purpose of handing to their fair partners such refreshments as they might choose. Lucy approached the table.

"What may I give you, Miss Dalton?" said Vidal.

"A little wine and water if you please," she replied; adding, as he immediately handed to her a glass which he had just prepared, "and give me five minutes into the bargain, Mr. Vidal. I want to speak to you so very much about this terrific play."

"Five minutes?" he repeated in a whisper, and

at the same time fixing his half-closed eyes upon her face. "Five minutes! five centuries, fair Lucy! But where are we to pass them, those five precious minutes?"

The provident Lucy held in her hand the volume containing the play, which after long parley, they seemed at length to have fixed upon. With this volume she now approached a lamp that stood on another table at a part of the room quite unoccupied, and appeared to be seeking out some particular passage in it. Vidal of course followed her, and she instantly said to him, with her eyes still fixed upon the book, and in a tone that none but himself could hear,—“Do you ever take a ramble before breakfast? If you do, come to-morrow at seven o'clock to the little wood on the hill, to the west of Dalbury Park. I dare say, I shall be there too, if the weather be fine.”

Lucy was right in losing no time in making this important speech, for the opportunity of doing so ceased, as she ceased to speak; the three Springfields, Mr. Evans, and Miss Clementson, all hastening to join in the consultation which appeared to be going forward.

The movements of the intruding party were so rapid, that Vidal had no time to speak his reply to

the rather startling words which had been addressed to him. But what member of the Vidal family, ever wanted the vulgar medium of words upon such an occasion? He looked at her for half an instant, but that was quite enough—yet he trusted not wholly to it, for when they parted, they shook hands, and a speaking pressure made her comprehend that she should not walk in the Oak Wood on the morrow in vain.

* * * * *

Theodore Vidal, was not a man to have reached the age of thirty-seven without adventures of various kinds, and of very various degrees of interest, and of strangeness; yet, nevertheless, he was a little startled at that which had now befallen him. That, rarely as they had met, and little as they had conversed together, he should have looked, and whispered, and waltzed the young girl's heart away, was certainly not a matter of any astonishment whatever to him. But that she should have desired him to meet her at seven o'clock in the morning in a wood, did rather surprise him.

It must be remembered, that during the first weeks of his residence in the neighbourhood, he had neither seen or heard of her; and that the style and manner in which he was introduced to her at

the Dalbury ball, and at one or two parties afterwards (for Mary had taken care to introduce "her friend, Miss Dalton," to every one, in a tone that insured her name being included in all the invitations which followed), had never suggested any doubt of her being born in a station of life to render her a suitable intimate for Miss Clementson. But now he no longer felt disposed to take this, or any other circumstance concerning her, upon trust; and, therefore, as soon as Lord Randal's carriage was fairly under weigh, he began making some inquiries on the subject.

"What a very lovely girl that fair-haired friend of Miss Clementson's is!" said he. "Is she related to your Dalbury heiress?"

"No!" said Lady Randal, rather drily.

"I believe not," added his lordship in the same key.

"Where does she come from?" demanded Vidal.

"What business have you, Mr. Vidal, to be making inquiries about lovely girls?" said Lady Randal. "On the whole, you do contrive to throw a good deal of dust into our curious eyes, and try, not quite in vain, to mystify us. Nevertheless, we are all, I believe, too well persuaded of your devotion to the fair maid of Compton, to think that you

have any right to appear particularly anxious about any other."

"Your ladyship must forgive me if I cannot subscribe to your law relative to young ladies. I never yet saw the fair maid, Lady Randal, nor the fair matron either, who could so occupy my heart as to blind my eyes; wherefore, I do again entreat your ladyship, or his kind lordship here, to tell me who and what may be the fair creature that men do call Lucy Dalton?"

"This is close questioning, Randal," said her ladyship, laughing, "and I protest that I think we must answer him."

"And I protest," said Lord Randal, "that I see no reason in the world why we should not. That fair creature, Vidal, as you very justly call her, is the daughter of good Squire Clementson's late coachman. I really have a very great respect for the kind-hearted and very worthy neighbour whose hospitality we have been sharing; but, nevertheless, I cannot deny that I suspect him to be a little subject to the malady called whim, and this introduction of the fair Jehuenna into his preserve, to perch side by side with his young heiress, is, in my estimation, a pretty strong proof of it."

"Is it possible?" murmured Vidal, affecting

more surprise than he felt. "The comely squire really has not the air of being so very great a fool as this might lead one to suppose; but perhaps a little scandal lies lurking behind; perhaps this beauteous Lucy is not the first fair-haired nymph that has adorned the sylvan haunts of Dalbury; perhaps there may be very *natural* reasons for Mr. Clementson thus placing himself in *loco parentis* to her."

"Not a bit of it," replied Lord Randal, "no; the whim, as I assure you, I have very justly called it, began by letting the coachman's daughter come in to play with the little motherless heiress soon after Mrs. Clementson died. I knew very little about them at that time, though my father always passed a few weeks every year at the Oaks. But if you really want to hear all, how, and about it, you had best apply to the Misses Jenkins, for it was Miss Elizabeth who told me all I have now told you, and who certainly appeared to know very well what she was talking about."

"I thank you, my dear lord, both for this satisfactory reference and for the communication which has made it unnecessary," replied Vidal, laughing; "your lordship has told me exactly all that I wanted to know, and, in justice to my own perspicuity, I will

confess to you that my chief reason for making inquiry concerning this radiant wild rose, was that I did not think that she was what we may scientifically call high bred; the pretty little *mignonne* her patroness, though not nearly so fine a girl, is infinitely more so."

"Decidedly," replied Lady Randal.

* * * * *

Having thus acquired all the information he wanted, and in fact precisely the sort of information he wished, Mr. Vidal set off very punctually the following morning, and having from an early labourer learnt which way to turn, his gun and his dog furnishing satisfactory evidence of his occupation, he found himself a gallant five minutes before the appointed hour, awaiting the appearance of Lucy under the shelter of the leafy region she had named.

And here, for the satisfaction of game preservers, I beg to observe that Mr. Clementson himself, had, in the most obliging manner signified to Mr. Vidal at their first acquaintance, that he was perfectly at liberty to extend his sporting rambles to Dalbury, and therefore, though he whistled his dog to his feet, he had not, on his own account, any fear of being challenged by the gamekeeper.

Lucy Dalton did not keep him waiting. Mary Clementson had given her a watch, little guessing, pretty creature, for what purpose it would first be used, and by the aid of this she had managed to make her appearance at the time she had named with a correctness which proved that whatever agitation she might feel at the approach of an interview so strangely sought, it was not of a nature to rob her of her presence of mind; neither did it rob her of speech, for it was her voice that first broke such silence as the chirruping blackbirds permitted to rest within that grove, by saying, as he eagerly sprang forward to meet her, "Indeed this is very kind of you, Mr. Vidal, so bold, so strange a request as mine hardly deserved, perhaps, so ready a compliance."

"Kind!" he exclaimed, "Oh, loveliest Lucy! what did not such a request deserve? Had my only means for reaching this dear spot been to have crawled to it on my knees, think you that I should have failed to be here?" and he ventured, as he spoke, to enclose her finely-formed waist with his arm.

"Nay, Mr. Vidal," said she, gently withdrawing herself, as Lelia, or Indiana would, doubtless, have done under similar circumstances; "nay, Mr. Vidal, do not make me think that I have been mistaken

in fancying I had found a friend; such kindness of manner as I have seen, or fancied I have seen in you when looking at, or speaking to me, might not have made the same impression on another, not on one more happily situated—but on me, oh ! the impression has been strong indeed.”

“Diable!” muttered Vidal to himself. “Is it possible that my beautiful sultana is going to metamorphose herself into a beggar girl?”—Not intending, however, to lose the species of amusement which he had anticipated from the peculiar manner in which the beautiful creature before him had thought proper to reward the “*kindness*” she had read in his looks, he replied by seizing her hand, and pressing it to his lips, saying as he did so *à plusieurs reprises*, “Mistaken ! Lovely Lucy ! Mistaken in supposing that in me you should find a friend ? No, no, sweetest, fear it not ! Only let the word *friend* in your vocabulary stand as the condensed expression of all the best tenderness and devotion that man can feel, or woman inspire, and I pledge myself to deserve it, now, and for ever !”

Lucy looked tenderly and steadfastly in his face for a moment, as if resolved not to let her youthful timidity stifle the feelings of her heart; and then said in a low but perfectly steady voice, “Shall

you fear the chillness of an autumn morning too much to place yourself beside me here?"

And as she spoke, she seated herself on the trunk of a tree, around which was a small "clearing," covered with turf so fine, that it seemed as if the deer must have found their way to it, and nibbled a sweet morsel there.

"This is my own drawing-room," she added, "and being the only one to which I have any right, I cherish it with peculiar fondness."

"And I, Lucy, shall henceforward cherish it with peculiar fondness, too," he replied, as he placed himself beside her. "And as for the chillness of the morning—tell me, honestly—do you think there is much danger of my suffering from it at this moment?"

Lucy suffered him to look fully at her eyes for a few seconds, that he might read her answer there; and then, withdrawing quietly, but resolutely, the hand which he had again taken, she proceeded to the business which she said, and said very truly, had brought her there.

"It is about this play, Mr. Vidal, that I particularly wish to consult you," said she. "And my reverence for common sense is so great, that I listen to its dictates in selecting you as my adviser, despite

all that forms, ceremonies, and prejudices, may seem to argue against it—for it is you who, I am very sure, are the most capable of giving me the advice of which I am in need.”

“I, too, reverence good sense, Lucy,” he replied, assuming the frank simplicity of manner which the occasion seemed to require, “and the proof you have given of possessing this quality, which I am afraid is as rare as it is estimable, adds a very deep feeling of respect to the admiration you inspired the first moment I beheld you.”

“Will you have patience with me, then,” she said, with a most beauteous smile, “will you be patient with me for a few short moments, while I make you acquainted with my situation?”

“Yes, Lucy, I will,” was the simple reply; but the tone said more than the words—and she knew well enough that it was only because he wished to spare her “common sense” the annoyance of unnecessary protestation, that he abstained from saying that any tale from her would be sufficient to “cure deafness.”

“You see me,” she began, “you see me, Mr. Vidal.”

“Oh! call me, Theodore!” he exclaimed, interrupting her, with a sort of passionate eagerness that made the words seem quite involuntary.

“Well then,” she resumed with a gentle smile, “you see me, Theodore, seated by the side of the wealthy heiress of Dalbury, as if I were her equal, but I wish you without further delay to know that I am the daughter of her father’s coachman.”

“Oh, Nature!” exclaimed Vidal, in another (of course) involuntary burst of enthusiasm, “if this be true, how nobly dost thou vindicate thy rights! On the heiress of Dalbury, thou hast bestowed with no sparing hand a thousand pretty gifts, making her as fair a little mortal nymph as ever danced a measure by earth-born candlelight. But thou, Lucy! thou lookest a goddess, and thou mov’st a queen! Oh, how very difficult is it to believe that you were not changed in your cradles!”

“Ah! There peeps out your aristocracy!” returned Lucy, playfully shaking her head. “You feel kindly, nay, I do believe, tenderly towards me—but you like not to think that it is indeed a peasant-born girl, who has inspired such feelings.”

“You speak jestingly,” he replied, “and, therefore, I forgive you. But by Heaven, Lucy, if I believed you in earnest in attributing to me a thought so vile, I would tear myself from your side, and never see you more! Yes, Lucy?” he added, starting up and looking at her with noble

indignation—"if I could believe it, I would tear myself from you for ever, for I should feel that we did not meet on equal terms. My heart tells me that I comprehend you—but in that case, I should know that the dear sympathy was not reciprocal, for that you most assuredly did not comprehend me."

"Then do not believe it!" returned Lucy, with a sort of magic smile, which it is not quite impossible she might herself have seen in the glass, but which he at that moment really thought the most beautiful he had ever seen in his life. So he sat down again, with a look which she interpreted exactly as he meant she should, which is far from being always the case when such a diamond-cut-diamond pair meet *tête-à-tête*.

"But peasant girl as I am," she resumed, "my education has been fully equal to that of my rather idle patroness. I have read much more than Miss Clementson, and what I read takes deeper root, I believe. Such as I am, however, the young lady fancies that she cannot do without me; and now that her strange father is determined to let her breathe the air of heaven beyond the sacred region enclosed by the Dalbury Park gates, I have been formally installed as her humble, but constant com-

panion. I do not mean to complain of this as an evil, for I love my young companion almost as well, I think, as she loves me, though I know full well that our minds are as different as our statures. Do not think me boastful, Theodore," she added, turning to meet the earnest gaze that was fixed upon her, "but this strange meeting can do me no good, if I have not courage to overcome all ordinary girl-like feelings. For before you can be useful to me, you must know me as I am."

"Go on!" said Vidal, speaking, as it seemed, with almost breathless eagerness.

"This constant companionship," she added, "has of necessity led to my being, as you yourself have seen, presented to the neighbourhood as one who was expected to be received into their society. And the society seem to think it wise to make no difficulties about it, judiciously considering, I dare say, that Mr. Clementson is likely to make his house sufficiently agreeable to render it worth their while to be decently civil to the humble companion of his daughter. Nor would the reception I should meet with be a matter of any great importance to me, excepting—oh, Vidal!—why should I attempt to conceal it?—excepting at the moment of my meeting with a being whom my whole soul seems

to proclaim was born to be my—what shall I say? my idol!—my fate!—my worshipped master!”

Mr. Vidal, as may easily be supposed, was, notwithstanding the early hour, and the dampness of the grass, on his knees before her in an instant, and kissing her hands alternately, with the most touching and satisfactory vehemence, he exclaimed,

“Angel!—enchanted!—irresistible!” And then, bending forward till his head rested upon her knee, he appeared altogether overpowered by his feelings.

“This will not do, my friend! This will not do for either of us!” said Lucy, “the very nearly dumb interchange of spirit which has taken place between us, Mr. Vidal, even before to-day, would render any attempt to disguise our feelings from each other worse than ridiculous. Nevertheless, we are neither of us at this moment so situated as to justify our giving way to emotions which this first moment of freedom is likely to call forth. Theodore!” she continued, in the deep, clear, low voice of an inspired Sybil, “Theodore! be as nobly frank with me, as I scruple not to say I have been with you. I believe you are affianced to Miss Maynard. Am I right, or wrong?”

“You are right, Lucy. But remember that I was

so before my eyes ever looked upon you. Pity me, then, rather than torture me by repellant harshness!"

"You have no cause to fear, Vidal," replied the well-read girl, with a very tranquil smile; "I have studied human nature in books, as well as in my own heart, and I know how great a mixture there is, and must be in us, of strength and weakness, of good and evil. This is our nature; but we wrong our nature, Oh! we greatly wrong it when we endeavour, with a pitiful and abortive tyranny, to force it from its natural bent, and make it other than it is. And truly do I believe that our nearest approach to happiness in life, is by yielding ourselves to the dictates of nature, as far as is consistent with the caution which our present artificial condition requires."

The enraptured Vidal applauded the pure morality of his beautiful inamorata to the echo, and concluded the burst of eloquence which it so naturally drew from him, with these words,

"Lucy! did every woman feel, think, and act like you, earth would become a heaven ready made, and the only immortality we could desire, would be to remain as we are, for ever and for ever!"

Again she smiled upon him with an expression

which spoke as much of admiration as of love. There was, in truth, so much of sympathy between his religion and her morality, that it was next to impossible they could avoid feeling a very strong power of attraction between them. They did feel it, and to a degree to make them both conscious that they were in some sort made for each other; their notions concerning mortal happiness and human enjoyment being so very similar, that each felt that their ruling tastes and propensities could not fail of being gratified and soothed by a close union with the other.

All this is very true, and such was, indeed, the state of their rapid reasonings, as well as of their mutual inclinations. Yet in the very midst, and hey-day of their tender passion, both had a strange sort of innate consciousness that care and caution would be necessary in dealing with the other. However, as *cautiousness* was developed in a very remarkable degree in both, the activity of the organ only added the gratification always experienced in the exercise of a predominating faculty, to the pleasure they mutually felt in this sudden ripening of attachment. Had not this organ been, indeed, very powerful within them, they might both have forgotten the necessity of separation. But, on the

contrary, both remembered it. It was, however, as it ought to have been, the task of Lucy to allude to the dire necessity.

“Alas! dear friend! she exclaimed, holding up her little watch before his eyes, “how rapidly do such moments as these escape us! I must return, Vidal. My position, at present, is not one of sufficient freedom to permit my forgetting, as methinks I easily could do, that there are other people in the world besides ourselves. Farewell, then, my newly-found treasure! Farewell, but not, I trust, for very long. Alas! of all I had to say to you, how little has been spoken!”

“How little, Lucy? Oh, rather marvel at thy own unequalled eloquence, that has enabled thee to say so much! Oh, Lucy, Lucy! what have not thy lips and eyes achieved within this one short hour? Am I, indeed, the same being that gaily dashed the dewy grass aside with rapid strides, that I might see again thy fair young face? Last night I thought you lovely, Lucy, oh, very lovely! But what do I think you now? How shall I find language to express all the delicious newness of emotion that this community of our spirits has awakened? I am fettered, entangled, oppressed by many difficulties. But what matters it if I have thee,

sweet one, as a hidden treasure, as a friend, a counsellor, a guardian angel? May not every species of misery be patiently endured, as long as this is left me?"

"Yes," replied Lucy, pressing her hand upon her heart, "I feel *here*, that you say truly."

"To-morrow, Lucy? At the same hour we meet again?"

"You know, Theodore," she answered, with a smile, "that I could not say no if I would! and if could, I would not," she added, tenderly! "for, from the little I have as yet seen of this strange world of ours, I am led to think there is no sin so grievous, no folly so unpardonable, as the depriving either ourselves or others of any happiness within our reach."

"Think ever thus, dear angel!" replied Vidal, suddenly pressing his lips upon her forehead. "Let this be our philosophy, and depend upon it, if we follow it, we shall find that we are more the artificers of our own destinies, than our blundering fellow-creatures generally suppose."

"I think so too," returned Lucy, with the quiet sedateness of tone which her school of philosophy may often be observed to assume, when a particu-

larly startling theory is propounded by one of its members.

“I know you must think so,” resumed Vidal. “A mind of such capacity as yours cannot think otherwise. All that remains to make you as perfect in character as in form is, that you should act uniformly and unshrinkingly, in conformity to your own enlarged views. Do you feel capable of this, my lovely friend?”

“We shall see,” replied Lucy, with another of her beautiful smiles.

He returned her smile by a very passionate glance, once more kissed her hand, and repeated the word, “To-morrow!” and then they parted, her path leading to the south, and his to the west.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS interview did for Lucy Dalton exactly all that she wished and intended it should do. It established an understanding between herself and the only man whom she passionately wished to captivate, of a kind sufficiently intimate and confidential to enable her, notwithstanding his "entanglements" and the restrained nature of her own position, to make him comprehend not only her feelings towards him, but all the superiority of intellect and of talent of which she was conscious. This had been her first great object, and this she had achieved boldly and effectually. The next thing she aimed at was to ascertain whether the pecuniary circumstances of his position were such as to make it desirable that she should employ her powers of fascination with the view of becoming his wife.

She greatly doubted this.

He had said nothing very definitive, but there was something in his tone, when speaking of what he called his entanglements, which led her to suspect that he was compelled to pay some attention to prudence in the choice of a wife.

This idea gave her no pain. Her own position was precisely similar, and she no more wished that the man she loved should plunge himself into pecuniary embarrassments by marriage, than that she should be tempted to commit the same imprudence herself. She imagined, however, that his difficulties in this respect were much less than her own, for she had nothing but (oh! hateful thought) her *wages* to depend upon, and it was impossible to suppose that any thing like this could be the case with him.

Yet still the difference between them might not be sufficient to prevent the same line of reason and of conduct from being applicable and necessary for both. These thoughts, which occupied her during her homeward walk, led her to look more gently, more bewitchingly than ever at the young lieutenant, who met her in the hall, and escorted her to the breakfast-table.

But the effect of this was stronger upon the squire and his daughter than upon the young man himself.

It is true that he had fully intended to fall in love with her, but he did not get on with it so fast as he intended. But still as his chief purpose in forming this determination was to convince his rich, proud cousin that, poor as he was, he did not intend to run away with his daughter, the necessity for persevering in it remained as strong as ever. Indeed, he every day felt the necessity and propriety of this perseverance increase rather than diminish, for he could not be blind either to the fact, that if he did not do something very decidedly calculated to prevent it, he should infallibly fall in love with Mary herself; or that Lucy had forestalled him in the project he had meditated, by falling desperately in love with him.

All this was very awkward and distressing, so much so, indeed, that the poor youth was only prevented from disobeying the very positive commands of his proud cousin, the squire, to stay where he was till his profession called him elsewhere, by perceiving the obvious distress he should draw upon the whole theatrical corps, by withdrawing his assistance from them.

Never did the blundering high-mindedness of a young head do more mischief than that of the luckless Richard Herbert. Had it not been for this,

every thing might have gone on so smoothly ! For, notwithstanding the foolish boy's persuasion that Mr. Clementson was very proud, he found himself growing more strongly attached to him every day, while, on the other hand, Mr. Clementson, in spite of the deep vexation caused by the disappointment of seeing Lucy preferred to his own darling, could not resist the attaching influence of Richard's charming character, so that, most unfortunately, he felt himself growing fonder of his society every day.

There were moments, however, when the kind-hearted squire felt in a rage with Richard, Lucy, and himself, and whenever this feeling arose in his heart, the idea that his Mary was certainly in love with Vidal, came upon him with a glow of satisfaction, for it not only gave him the very comfortable assurance that she would not break her heart for love of Richard, whatever he might do himself, but also that he might make her supremely happy by giving her the man of her choice, even if he did not turn out to be either rich or noble. For what did the squire of Dalbury care for either, in comparison with the happiness of his Mary, and the inestimable advantage of obtaining a husband for her who had no particular home of his own ?

Meanwhile, the theatrical committee met, and all

the bustling business of rehearsals began. The corps was really a very clever one, and their exertions promised well for the amusement of others as well as for their own. Mary was in ecstasies. Her parts in both the pieces about to be performed were of the *soubrette* order, and the singing, which was the nearest approach to a *Vaudeville*-that an English translation could give, was her greatest exertion of talent. She had no fears of breaking down, no terrors lest she should not be perfect, no ambition to do any thing greater, but the very greatest amusement in doing so much.

The condition of her friend Lucy was very different, though her enjoyment was certainly not less. The source of Mary's pleasure was the gay *sans souci* with which she watched every body's performance without having the slightest anxiety about her own. Lucy's vehement emotions and triumphant joys kept her in a perfect fever of excitement; but she would not have exchanged her state for that of Mary if she could have gained the broad lands of the light-hearted heiress as her reward. The part assigned her was one of vehement and devoted passion, of which Vidal was the object, and her performance of it was well calculated to inspire the feelings she so ably expressed.

The effect upon Vidal was greater than he could have believed possible. When he was first made fully aware, by her own boldly frank confession, of the passionate love with which he had inspired her, he gave it the sort of libertine return that his character and his principles naturally prompted, and he saw in this no degree of infidelity towards the beautiful Clara, that any tolerably philosophical mind could have deemed seriously deserving of censure; but before the last of the three theatrical representations, which the "unbounded applause" of the little audience led to, was over, he began to feel that he had treated the power of the coachman's impassioned daughter too lightly.

The heart and principles of Vidal were practically depraved; but the heart and principles of Lucy were theoretically as far removed from pristine innocence as his own. The chief difference between them lay in the fresh intensity of her newly-awakened feelings, and this gave her both a power and a charm which he was astonished to feel, and which he scarcely understood. Had she mixed up with her passionate love and admiration any portion of that strong propensity of interested selfishness which made another powerful portion of her character, the effect would have been wholly different;

her dependent situation would in that case have pleaded with fatal eloquence against her, both by alarming his own prudential feeling, and leading him to doubt the entirety of the sentiment in her which now in its unmistakable and vehement intensity made her so irresistible in his eyes.

But with all the keen-sighted acuteness of her subtle character she perceived that an attempt to obtain the hand of Vidal in marriage would not only be unsuccessful, but endanger for ever and for ever the possession of his heart; and it was with the consciousness of perfect security from all the perils usually attendant upon a rapidly increasing passion for a penniless and low-born woman, that Vidal yielded himself without struggle, caution, or resistance of any kind, to the fascinations of this beautiful and highly-talented creature.

Her false position in society aided, rather than impeded her influence, for she speedily made him feel that whatever hopes she might entertain of rendering her existence less dependent by means of marriage with another, she shrank from the idea of his involving himself in so imprudent an act, with feelings of worldly prudence as widely awake as his own, and a careful watchfulness of his interest which was scarcely less so.

In short, the accomplished Vidal was now in a position not only quite new, but of so entrancing a character, that for the first time in his life he was in some danger of suffering his own interest to be forgotten in the vehemence of passion, and this danger was the more real from his believing himself so particularly certain that he was safe. The most dangerous feature of his case, perhaps, was the species of jealousy which, little as he had cause for it, began to torment him as he marked the gentle and attaching tone of Lucy's manners towards young Herbert.

There was one moment at which this became so delightfully evident to Lucy herself, that she almost forgot her caution—that caution under cover of which she had so successfully stormed the (pre-engaged) heart of the man she loved, and led it to surrender in the firm belief that no danger of any kind could follow.

“If he cannot endure,” thought she, “to see me speak to, and smile upon the handsome boy, how will he endure the seeing me marry him. Yet marry I must; he knows that, and if he will not bear to see me marry another, what follows? Oh! Vidal! Vidal! To bear thy name; to be acknowledged and proclaimed thy chosen one before the eyes of all men! What years of existence would I not sacrifice to

insure this bliss, this triumph, this joy unspeakable, for a dozen years?"

But neither the jealousy of Vidal, nor the love of Lucy, so completely overpowered the faculties of either as to render them quite incapable of taking very tolerably good care of themselves. Though very strongly persuaded that Vidal was not rich, Lucy, as yet, knew nothing definite respecting his circumstances, and having yielded herself for a moment to the contemplation of a species of union which would have gratified so many feelings at once, she suddenly stopped short, as it were, in her rhapsody, and murmured, "To-morrow, we meet again, under the sacred shelter of that dear, well-known wood, and then I will so manage as to know more."

And on the morrow they did meet again, each having a particular object in view. It was the purpose of Vidal to convince Lucy that if her love for him was as perfect as she declared it to be, she would be guilty of cowardice, and of a multitude of other very paltry and contemptible feelings, if she did not at once consent to give herself to him in the only way that their mutual circumstances rendered possible. He had never yet incumbered his slender income with the expense of a similar addition to his

establishment, and even now he marvelled, and almost trembled, at the strength of the feeling which led him to wish that she would at once accompany him abroad, where, as he thought, he might be able to place her in some economical retreat, to which he could easily return from time to time (whether married or single), and from whence he also thought she might emerge, after a little teaching from him, to commence what might prove a very brilliant career on the stage.

Lucy's purpose was to ascertain how many pounds sterling per annum her Theodore possessed, and also what his feelings and intentions were respecting his engagement with Miss Maynard.

And here it may be observed, *en passant*, that Lucy Dalton was tormented by no very violent jealousy of the beautiful Clara. She had heard the rumour of Vidal's engagement to her. She had named it to him, and had heard from his own lips that it was true. She had looked at her with the scrutinising eye of female criticism, and been unable to detect a single defect either in face or form. And yet she was not jealous of her, for Lucy looked further than that faultless face, and convinced herself beyond all danger of doubting, that there was no passion there—no such passion as could bear

comparison in the eyes of such an one as Vidal, with that to which she was ready, if required, to sacrifice every thing. She had watched Vidal when looking at Clara, she had watched him when looking at herself, and she was not jealous. Nevertheless, she felt that it might be possible that he should persevere in his purpose of marrying her. He might be too deeply involved in difficulties; he might be too poor to give her up, or too openly compromised to jilt her safety.

And thus they met, mutually determined not to part, till they had made another step in advance in their love's history.

The first moments of the interview were given to such tender greetings as may easily be imagined under the circumstances, and then Lucy, after gently chiding the time-consuming trifling of her lover, addressed him thus;

“ Our first interview under these sheltering trees, dear Theodore, was not an idle one. I came to it determined that it should not end till we had both found out the real nature of the sentiment which, even in the presence of a crowd, and in all the tumult of society, had seemed so irresistibly to draw us together. I gained my object, dearest Vidal, then, and you must let me gain it now. Had we

not then seized on the opportunity I so *bravely* made for opening our hearts to each other, could we have enjoyed all the dear secret deep-felt delight which our little theatre, and all it gave birth to, has afforded us? Could we, Vidal?"

"No, dearest, no!" replied her companion, once more throwing his arm round her, and pressing her to his heart. "All that had previously occurred to me in this neighbourhood, delightful as I had thought it, faded away upon my memory, like the traces of an idle, meaningless dream, while every hour since has been marked by a truth and intensity of feeling, more consonant to the natures of us both, my love, than any thing that had preceded it. Since that day, Lucy, I have felt real, genuine, waking ecstasy! But my soul craves for happiness more perfect still; you must listen to me, Lucy—you must learn to know, dearest, that such love as mine is not to be trifled with; you must listen to me, while I—"

"Yes, I will listen to you, Theodore," she replied, interrupting him. "I came here but to listen to you. But your words must be—at any rate your *first* words, Vidal, must be in reply to mine. You are too courteous, love! to refuse precedence to a few words from your Lucy."

"Speak, then, dearest!" he replied, "I'm bound to hear."

“So are you to reply when you do hear,” she answered in the same tone; but then, suddenly changing it from gay to grave, she added, “before we part this time, Vidal, you must tell me fully, wholly, and with the unshrinking truth my perfect love deserves, all the circumstances of your actual situation. You know mine. I have hid nothing from you, not even the degrading fact that it is necessary I should marry to insure me bread. There was no need, Vidal, that I should tell you this, save that which grew out of the confiding love I bear you. Show me in return an equal love. Do you persevere in your intention of marrying Miss Maynard, because her fortune, or her aunts’ fortune, is necessary to you?”

Vidal paused for a moment before he replied, and then said, “You question very closely, my sweet Lucy. Nor have I the very slightest wish to evade your questioning. Had Miss Maynard not been beautiful, I never should have made any inquiry respecting her fortune, and if, when I did inquire, I had not been told that she would eventually possess sufficient property to make a desirable addition to my own, I should speedily have taught myself to forget that she *was* beautiful. As far as

regards the forgetting her beauty, a shorter process has been found for effecting it, than any which prudent considerations respecting money would have been likely to prove. A fact of which you, my fair one, are, I suspect, too well aware for it to be necessary that I should dilate upon it further. Nevertheless, Lucy, I do still opine that it will be necessary for me to marry Miss Maynard. Besides the property of her aunts, which is in land, and, as I understand worth greatly more than they receive from it, Clara has two thousand pounds of her own—a sum which, trifling as it is, Lucy, may be very important to me, as it might enable me to realise a project in which you, dearest, are deeply concerned.”

“Then you mean to tell me, Vidal, that you are yourself totally without fortune?”

“No, Lucy,” he replied, colouring, “I mean to tell you no such thing. For it would be as false, dearest, as you are lovely. I have an assured income of some hundreds, dearest; but I will not conceal from you that my personal habits are habitually expensive—nor will I deny that I ought now to be richer than I am, or that I have heretofore squandered, what I would now gladly recall, that I might bestow it upon you, my dearest love. But that all

such wishes are vain, we know but too well. In short, my sweet Lucy, to answer your question as frankly as it was put, the fortune of Miss Maynard is necessary to me—unless indeed. . . .”

“Unless what, Vidal?” said Lucy, with her eyes steadfastly fixed on his face.

“Unless, my dearest love, I could be fortunate enough to meet with a richer wife, and one, too, who might be obtained immediately. For then, Lucy, I might immediately prove to you how greatly your love, your interest, your happiness, is more precious to me than any thing else in the world!”

Lucy was disappointed. She had hoped for one short moment, that Vidal’s “unless” alluded to some love-inspired thought of marrying her—but the feeling though bitter enough, was not enduring. She had not read his words, accents, or thoughts so widely amiss as to make any such hope either deep or lasting. And she called up one of her beautiful smiles as she replied—“A richer wife? Where will you find her, Vidal? The Miss Springfields, they tell me, are entirely dependant on their brother, and Miss Hatton is engaged.”

“I was not thinking, Lucy, either of the Miss Springfields, or Miss Hatton, or any other fair one

so far afield. Did you ever hear of such a person as the heiress of Dalbury, Lucy?"

"Mary?" she exclaimed, while her lovely complexion changed from the rose to the peony. "Mary! Oh no! that is impossible."

"Impossible, my love? and why? Why should you think it impossible?" said Vidal, eyeing her steadily. "You cannot surely have the folly of supposing I have any feeling towards her, likely to produce any shadow of jealousy in your heart? I have loved Clara—or at any rate fancied that I loved her, and assuredly I still admire her, much, very much. You may perceive by this, dearest, that I have no wish to deceive you. But as for your little heiress, no, no, Lucy! I am not in love with her, I assure you. Yet still I see not why it should be impossible I should marry her."

"Nay—I am wrong, and you are right, dear Theodore! If we are to sacrifice ourselves at all, it were certainly wise to do so in the most profitable manner," said Lucy, perfectly recovering her composure. "I started merely like a skittish colt, upon seeing what had never been looked at before. But how is it to be achieved, dear friend? Mr. Clementson, I imagine would require more than a few hundreds a year in a son-in-law."

“I am not sure of that, Lucy. I have not observed her sufficiently to be quite certain of the fact—but—I am not very apt to be mistaken in such matters, and I assuredly have thought that the young lady has regarded me with some favour, and that her father is not likely to thwart any fancy of hers. You, Lucy, might very easily help me, I should think, in discovering the real state of the case. And if I am right, the speculation, my love, might prove a good one. A good one for us both, my Lucy.”

Lucy listened with a doubting expression, which puzzled him; and well it might, for at that moment she really knew not herself what was the predominant feeling which his words produced. Surprise was strongly mixed with it, for while she was quite aware that Vidal was not a man likely to blunder in such matters, she did not think herself very likely to blunder either, and a different idea had taken possession of her mind on the subject. She thought that from the very first day of young Herbert's arrival, she had seen in Mary strong symptoms of her liking him vastly better than he liked her. And it was necessary to comprehend all the deep-rooted envy that rankled at the very bottom of Lucy's heart towards her unsuspecting patroness, in order to be fully aware of the pleasure

which this idea had occasioned her. Of Richard's attachment to herself, she had never entertained the slightest doubt; but as there was nothing in his frank and unsophisticated character at all calculated to captivate such a heart as hers, the chief pleasure which she derived from this supposed conquest, arose from believing that by gaining the affections of Herbert, she had robbed Mary of a triumph which would have been dearer to her than any other in the world. The idea that she had deceived herself in this, was disagreeable to her, and her confidence in her own judgment, as much as her wish to believe she had been right, made it difficult for her to receive the assurance that she had been wrong.

This it was which gave to her fair face the doubting expression which puzzled her lover. But it took only a short time to bring her to the conviction that it was more likely that Vidal should be right than herself. And, also, that if it were so, her triumph would be greater still. Her reply, therefore, was uttered with a smile.

"Can it be possible, Theodore?"

"And why not, Lucy?" he replied, "does it seem impossible to you that any eye but your own should look at me with affection?"

"Nay, it may be possible," she said, with a

smile, half jest, half tenderness; "but that doubt of an instant, which you so bravely challenged with your saucy eyes, arose from my having thought the Adonis cousin had caught the fancy of our minniken heiress."

"But should it prove that I am right, my lovely one;—should it prove that I might, if I took the trouble to ask it, obtain this minniken heiress, and her not minniken acres, would you mar, or make my fortune? I think it likely enough that you might do either," said Vidal, with rather a scrutinising glance.

"I think so, too," returned Lucy, nodding her head at him with an answering glance. "And you need not ask with that suspicious look of yours, whether I intend to be jealous. Be very sure I do not,—if I did!—"

And for the small fraction of an instant, a something mounted to that pale eye of hers, which made Vidal fancy it just possible, that if circumstances happened to be favourable,

*"Some fierce passions flashing through her form,
Might*

"Make her a beautiful embodied storm."

But, confidential as were the terms they were upon, and extra-confidential as was the nature of

their present conference, he did not feel tempted to mention the quotation which that glance suggested; but instead of this, he again threw his arm round her, again pressed his lips to hers, and repeated his question, but without giving another scrutinising glance.

“Would you mar or make my fortune, Lucy?”

“I would make it, Vidal,” she replied, in a tone of firmness and decision, that seemed to promise both power and will. “I would make it, because there is a deep conviction here,” and she placed his hand upon her heart, “that our future fortunes are one;—we love!—deeply, passionately! There is no cant of courtship, no falsehood, no fallacy in this. We need neither of us trust the other. We have only to trust ourselves. It is this feeling—this strong conviction—that you could no more live without me, than I could live without you, which places me completely beyond the reach of jealousy. Marry when you may, Vidal, it is I who must be the bride of your heart and soul. Poor little Mary, and her acres! Yes, dearest, the thought pleases me. You will not greatly wonder, perhaps, if I tell you that knowing myself, and knowing her as I do, the sort of mocking mystery which so completely defies all just notions of right and wrong,

in the distribution of fortune, has puzzled and provoked me, while contemplating the relative positions of this silly child and myself. But it is often the task of those endowed with more than an average portion of intellect, Theodore, to set right these blunders of fortune. If Theodore Vidal marries Mary Clementson, Lucy Dalton will reap the harvests that her acres bear, and this proves the truth of the best line that the half-enlightened mind of Shakspeare ever produced.

‘ Strength *must* be lord of imbecility!’

And at this moment I know no way more effectual of producing this perfectly equitable state of things, than by my giving you my assistance to make you master of the mistress of Dalbury ! the legal lord of the little *madam*, as her hateful father ostentatiously calls her.”

“ Then be it so, my love,” replied Vidal, almost submissively; “ I leave you to decide my destiny and your own, with this restriction only, that they shall be for ever united.”

* * * * *

The conversation which followed related to two points. The first dismissed, concerned only the ways and means to be put in action, in order to dis-

cover what ground of hope there was that the matrimonial arrangement so cordially approved by both of them, might be brought about. And it was decided that Lucy should cross-examine the heart of her innocent patroness upon the subject.

If her report were favourable, they both agreed in thinking that she would be indulged in this, as well as in every other wish or whim of which her doting father was aware.

“All this may be very easily managed,” said Lucy, with a sort of sneer at the facility of her part of the enterprise. “I dare say you are right, as to her having a fancy for you; and if it does exist, you may trust *me* for making her confess it; which, if she does, I shall forthwith deem it my duty to seek a private interview with her papa, for the purpose of revealing to him my fears for the health, nay, perhaps the life, of my beloved patroness, if she does not obtain the object of her choice! And then the worthy gentleman will seek an interview with you, dear friend, wherein, I doubt not, you will acquit yourself well. All this, Vidal, seems easy enough. But methinks there is another task before you, in which you will find more difficulty. How do you propose, dearest, to get rid of your little entanglement with Miss Maynard?”

Vidal smiled. "A very short time ago, a marvellously short time ago, my Lucy," he replied, "such a task would have been, indeed, difficult; not from any difficulty in finding reasons for breaking off the engagement—reasons, on such occasions, are to be found as plenty as blackberries—but it would have been difficult, from the nature of my own feelings towards her; even now, now that I stand in the presence of your fascinations, Lucy, I cannot comprehend the magic by which the change has been wrought. I mean not to assert—you would not believe me if I did—that I have not loved, or fancied that I loved, a thousand times. But this beautiful Clara Maynard! I really and truly thought and believed that she was born to be my wife. Her beauty I considered as perfect—nay, I think so still—and there were a multitude of minor circumstances connected with her, which made her appear precisely the sort of person that it would suit me to marry. As to my thinking that a richer wife would suit me better still, there is nothing very puzzling in that; but where is the influence of her beauty gone? Why do I look at her now precisely as if she were made of marble? Where is all its charm, its influence gone? Tell me, Lucy, *Maga* that thou art! tell me where?"

"It is gone where the light of the stars goes,

Vidal, when the sun walks up the eastern sky," replied Lucy, composedly.

"I mean not to assert," she continued, "that I am as beautiful as Clara; my features are less perfect. But you blundered, Vidal, in supposing that your admiration of beauty, which, comparatively speaking, is but an abstract sentiment, a matter of taste, and critical artistic judgment—you blundered greatly, Vidal, in mistaking *that* for the feeling that was to dominate your spirit, and to rule your life. Such beings as you and I, dear Theodore, want more than beauty, nay, more than intellect, to master us; we must feel power, and the consciousness that this power is mutual but increases its strength. The grasp is mutual; and if it be ever loosened, the release must be mutual too."

"She fables not!" exclaimed Vidal, passionately throwing his arms round her. "I see the chain, I feel it, I know its life-long power, and I hug it, Lucy!"

* * * * *

And the second point discussed that day before they parted related to their "*own union*" as Vidal called the connexion which was to bind them together so solemnly for life; and a question arose as to the comparative advantages likely to arise from

Lucy's marrying or not marrying. When this question was first plainly stated, which it was by Lucy herself, Vidal asserted rather vehemently that he could see no possible advantage for her from clogging her movements with such an appendage as a husband, and that at any rate he must insist upon her abandoning any such project at present.

To this burst Lucy listened with a tender sort of languid acquiescence, which more than contented, which enchanted her lover; and he passionately offered to bind himself to her in any manner or by any document she could suggest, if she would give him a written promise in return not to marry till he gave his full consent to her doing so.

"Are we not like a pair of children, Theodore?" said Lucy, in reply to this proposal. "We seem as if we wanted to play like other folks, at making believe; as if you and I, dearest, could find either profit or peril in the idle written records given, and received, by those who not being very sure that they know their own minds are apt to suspect their beloveds of similar uncertainty; nevertheless, my own dear Vidal, I had rather commit a thousand follies than refuse you one request. Let me see. What is it I am to promise you?"

“That you will never marry any one without my consent,” said he.

“And you? What are you to promise me?” she demanded with a smile.

“What you will, Lucy!” he replied; “I have told you that I am a poor man, and an expensive one. You know this now, as well as I do, dearest, and will legislate for me accordingly, better perhaps than I could for myself. I will write the promise, love, that I wish you to sign, and write what you please, on your side. I am greatly mistaken if I shall make any difficulty in putting my name to it.”

In a few low-whispered words between them, it was also settled that Lucy should confess to her mother that a gentleman had become attached to her, whose position made it necessary that their engagement should be kept secret for a time, and therefore that they must see each other occasionally at her cottage; the very greatest care being taken on her part that those interviews were kept secret.

And then they parted, each completely satisfied with what had passed, and *more in love, if possible, than ever.*

CHAPTER IX.

OF all that had been thus settled, the first, and perhaps the most important thing was the conversation which Lucy had promised to hold with Mary.

There was no difficulty in obtaining this, although the happy heiress was busily engaged with Mrs. Morris in practising the songs she had to sing at the next theatrical festival. Lucy had but to show herself, and say, "Come, Mary; come and take a walk with me;" and Mary was at her side in a moment.

"Is Richard going with us?" said she, looking archly under Lucy's bonnet; for Lucy herself did not more firmly believe in the young lieutenant's attachment to her, than did Mary.

"No, dear," was the reply. "You know, well enough, saucy one, that I like your cousin's com-

pany quite as well as it is at all discreet that I should do. But I don't want him now."

The garden bonnet and shawl of Mary were ever ready in the billiard-room, and as soon as she had put them on, the two girls walked forth, arm in arm, towards the flower-garden, which, having entered, Lucy closed the little Gothic door, and led her companion to the beautiful sheltered lawn from which the orange trees, late as it was in the autumn, were not yet removed.

"Let us sit down here, dear Mary," said she, "it is still as warm as midsummer."

Mary seated herself on the bench indicated, and then said, "Lucy, I am quite sure that you have something particular to say to me; every thing is settled between you and Richard, I am sure of it, quite, quite sure."

"Quite, quite sure," repeated Lucy, marking the augmentation of colour in the cheek of her companion; and, noting it in her memory, as an additional reason for accepting the boy, in case nothing more attractive was within her reach. "You are quite, *quite* sure, Miss Clementson?"

"Well, then, if I am wrong," returned Mary, laughing, "tell me what it is; for you cannot deny, Lucy, that I am right. You cannot deny

that you *have* something particular to say to me."

"No," replied Lucy, gravely, "I cannot. But before I say it, you must promise me, my ever dear Miss Clementson, that you will not be angry with me. You must promise to remember that it is your most affectionate friend who takes this liberty, and not merely poor Lucy Dalton."

"Fie, fie, Lucy! How can you suppose such a preface necessary? But I am dying with curiosity. Go on, my dearest girl, if you love me," returned the heiress, eagerly.

"I will go on, Mary, because I love you," said Lucy, affectionately, "and because another loves you too. Oh! Mary, you blush and turn away from me! How much easier, dear, it is to talk of the affairs of other people than of our own; is it not? Confess at once that you find it so."

"I don't know, I am sure," said Mary, picking up a most uninteresting bit of stick from the grass, "and as to having any affairs of my own to talk about, you know perfectly well that it is quite ridiculous."

"Making people unhappy, Mary, is something much worse than being ridiculous. Don't you think so? Answer me sincerely."

“Making people unhappy! What can you mean, Lucy? Who did I ever make unhappy? Or how can you suppose that I should ever wish to do so?” replied her blushing companion.

“Perhaps you may have done it without wishing, Miss Mary; but I do believe that you have made a gentleman, whom every body seems to like and esteem, very unhappy, you have made poor Mr. Vidal fall in love with you, and unless you, and your papa too, intend that his love should be successful, you are very wrong, both of you, in my opinion, to let him go on in the manner you do.”

“Indeed, Lucy, I think you are talking a great deal of nonsense,” said Mary, getting up, and seeming to think that the conversation had been long enough; “every body says, you know, that Mr. Vidal is going to be married to Miss Maynard.”

“Not quite every body, Mary,” said Lucy, gently taking her arm, and making her reseal herself, “not quite every body; for I heard Mr. Evans say to somebody, only last night, when he did not know, by the by, that I was within hearing, ‘I do pity that poor fellow Vidal, he is dying for love of that little Clementson heiress, and the chances are a hundred to one against her having him; she likes him well enough, indeed, that is quite evident, but

I don't suppose her father will let her marry any one who has not an estate as large as his own. He is a horribly proud old fellow—that Squire Clementson !” It was hearing this, Mary, which decided me upon speaking to you openly, and at once, and I really don't think you can blame me.”

“ Nor do I blame you, Lucy ; but, indeed, indeed, you surprise me. That Mr. Vidal, who seems to have all the world at his feet, that he should be pitied—and because of me ! It does seem to me so improbable ! I should really be ashamed of myself if I could believe it.”

“ Answer me one question, Mary ; I know that if you answer it at all, you will answer it truly ; have you never, never thought that Mr. Vidal admired you ? Did you never think he liked to dance with you better than with other people ?” demanded Lucy, gravely.

“ Indeed, you puzzle me,” said Mary, innocently, “ he has often asked me to dance, when certainly he might have danced with other people, if he had liked to do so better ; but excepting this—”

“ Oh ! Mary !” cried Lucy, interrupting her, “ do you really mean to say that he has never given you any other proof of liking ? Has he never sat at your side ? Has he never talked to you more

than to others ? Compare his manner to you, dearest, with that of your cousin Herbert. Did he ever hover round your chair as I have seen Vidal do ? And why is it that you suppose Mr. Herbert likes me ? Why do you fancy yourself so very sure of it ? Have you any other reason, except that he has shown to me the same sort of attention that Mr. Vidal has shown to you ? You have no other reason—none, none whatever. Is not this true, Mary ?”

“ Yes, Lucy, it is true,” replied Mary, colouring ; “ yet still it seems to me impossible, that such a man as Mr. Vidal, the only one of all the unmarried gentlemen I have seen, whom any body seems much to care about ; it appears to me so very unlikely that he should really be in love with me. I am now speaking to you, dear Lucy, with as much truth as if I were conversing with my own heart, and therefore, dear, you ought to speak to me in the same manner, and not add a word in the way of jest, in order to hoax me, and then laugh because I take it seriously. Will you promise not to do this ?” she added, very earnestly.

“ I will promise it, Miss Mary. I am in no humour to jest now, I assure you,” said Lucy, gravely. “ I know that people, particularly young people, of

course, are so likely to be mistaken in such matters, that I have gone on for a whole week, hiding from you what I had got in my head, because I thought that nothing could happen so bad as my deluding you on such a subject by any fancies of my own. But when people begin to talk as Mr. Evans did last night, I confess I think the time for such forbearance is over, and that I should be a very false friend, if I did not point out to you the situation in which you are placed, and my doing so is the strongest proof of my affection."

"That is all very right, and very kind, Lucy," replied Mary; "but it cannot do me any good, unless you go on, and tell me what I ought to do about it. You know I always go to papa, when I am puzzled about any thing, and he sets me right in a minute. But I feel as if it were absolutely impossible that I should go to him now, and say, 'I am told, papa, that Mr. Vidal is in love with me. Please to tell me what I ought to do about it?' Would it be possible to do this, Lucy? Do you think it would?"

"I don't know about *possible*, Miss Clementson," returned Lucy, "but I do not think it would be at all proper. I should say that you have no right, in that light, gossiping sort of way, to make the

feelings of Mr. Vidal, or of any other man, the subject of discussion with your papa. No, Mary, no, it is not your papa, dearly as you love him, that you ought to consult at this stage of the business, but your own heart; ask yourself the question. Do you like Mr. Vidal, or do you not?"

"Yes, certainly I like him," replied Mary, frankly, but colouring a little at the same time. "But does not every body like him, Lucy? Do you think you could ask the same question of any person, without receiving the same answer? Who do we know, who would be likely to say that they did not like Mr. Vidal?"

"My dear Miss Clementson," said Lucy, "I have always thought you the very truest person in the world; but I have read somewhere, that young ladies never *can* be true when their hearts are concerned; and I suppose it has been said with justice. Now tell me, will you, whether what you have just spoken has any truth, any sincerity in it whatever? Suppose we were to ask the Miss Springfields, or the Miss Whites, or the Miss Marklands, if they liked Mr. Vidal, and suppose they were to answer, yes; would that satisfy you as to the state of your own heart concerning him? Do you really think that Mr. Vidal has talked to them,

has behaved to them, in the same manner that he has to you. Yes, or no, Mary? Have the courage to answer me sincerely."

"No," replied Mary, but in a voice that was very little above a whisper.

"Then seek not to deceive yourself any longer, my dearest friend! Mr. Vidal *does* love you, Miss Clementson; and if you trifle with his affection you will be acting very ill, and I think your own heart ought to tell you this without my assistance."

"But what would you have me to do, Lucy Dalton?" said Mary, looking really distressed. "Mr. Vidal has never told me that he loved me, and it does not seem to me that I have any right to suppose he does. Then what power have I to avoid what you call trifling with him?"

"I will tell you, Miss Mary, if you really wish that I should do so. You ought at once to ask yourself whether, in case he did make you a proposal of marriage, you should wish to accept, or refuse him? Depend upon it that when you have once made up your mind upon that point, your manner will (unconsciously to yourself, perhaps) cease to be such as to prolong the dreadful state between hope and fear, from which, poor man, he is now so evidently suffering."

“Suffering! Oh, Lucy! Lucy!” exclaimed the heiress. “Indeed, indeed, you are fancying all this. Could Mr. Vidal talk, sing, dance, and act, with the charming grace and spirit that he does, if he were suffering? You talk nonsense, Lucy.”

“We had better say no more about it, Miss Clementson,” said Lucy, shaking her head dolefully, with the air of a person who, being deeply in earnest, is wounded by the levity of a friend. “You either cannot or will not see things as they really are. I heartily hope that Mr. Vidal, who certainly is an admirable person, in every way, will soon learn to understand the childish lightness of your character, better than he seems to do at present.”

“Upon my word, Lucy, you will make me believe by and by, that I am a very wicked person. Yet I am sure I don’t know what you would think it right for me to do,” said Mary, looking very sorrowful.

“Do this, Mary,” replied Lucy, solemnly. “Tell me, as the best and surest way of telling yourself, tell me if you would accept Mr. Vidal, if he offered to you?”

Again, Mary coloured—and for a moment remained silent, but then replied very gravely, “I think you are wrong in asking the question, Lucy,

and that I should be wrong if I answered it. If Mr. Vidal has any such thoughts in his head as you suppose, it is to my father he ought to avow them. And then my father, and my father only, would have a right to put such a question to me as you have now asked. And it would be then only, that I should feel bound to answer it."

"Alas! you are right, Miss Clementson!" said Lucy, sighing deeply. "I have no rights—for painfully do you make me feel that no degree of affection in an humble dependant can give any. No! not if life itself were given to prove her devotion. Oh! how deeply do I feel this!"

"Oh! say not so! my dear, dear Lucy," replied Mary, bursting into tears. "Forgive me for using such a phrase. I don't think I meant it, I don't think I ought to mean it, I don't think I ought to mean any thing that could pain you—for we have loved each other so very, very long. But yet on such a subject as we have now been talking upon, I do feel that papa ought to be my first, and perhaps my only counsellor. Nevertheless, Lucy, I do value your advice, and most truly confide in your affection. But do not let us talk any more of Mr. Vidal, till we have stronger reasons for believing that you are right than any words spoken by Mr. Evans can offer."

There was a quiet simplicity of good sense in this, which went further towards defeating Lucy's projects than the strongest assurances of indifference from Mary could have done, and she rose from the bench, thinking that for the present it might be wisest to let the matter rest. Nay, at that moment, something very like despair of her ever getting the reaping of Mary's acres came over her, and a multitude of new projects began immediately to sow themselves as it were, in her fertile brain.

But ere Mary had tied the strings of her bonnet, which she had untied during the agitation of the preceding dialogue, a new and very bright idea seized her companion, who suddenly stopping, turned round abruptly upon her, and pressing her hand upon her own fair forehead with the strong emotion, exclaimed, "Oh! Mary! Mary! Perhaps you are not conscious of it yourself! But I see it all now! Oh, fool that I have been, devoting my thoughts to the misery of others, and turning blindly away from my own!"

"What *do* you mean, Lucy?" returned her startled patroness, stepping back to the bench they had left, and reseating herself. "Sit down, dear Lucy! Sit down. Good Heaven! How you tremble! What can be the matter with you?"

“Wait one moment, Miss Clementson. I cannot speak yet,” replied Lucy, her hands clasped, her eyes shut, and her whole person trembling with apparent agitation. “But I will speak. *I* have no father to consult, I can only consult my own heart, and that bids me so to speak, as shall enable me to know at once what I have to fear, and what to hope.” Here she stopped short as if unable to proceed, but presently continued, “Tell me, Miss Clementson, and tell me truly I conjure you, is not your strange, and apparently unnatural indifference to the love of Mr. Vidal, caused by your own love for Richard Herbert?”

“Love for Richard Herbert!” exclaimed poor Mary, becoming first red, and then pale, and trembling almost as much from real agitation, as her crafty companion had done from what was fictitious. “*I* love Richard Herbert? I, who know so well that he loves you! Have I deserved to be thus suspected, Lucy? What have I ever done, or said, to suggest such suspicions?”

“I suspect you of nothing unkind—nothing dishonourable, my dearest Mary! Alas! If I am right, you are as much to be pitied perhaps, as poor Vidal. For I will not deny that I believe your cousin loves me. And wretched, oh! deeply wretch-

ed shall I be if I am the cause of your unhappiness!" And here Lucy Dalton began to weep.

"My unhappiness?" said Mary, with suddenly recovered composure. "Do you know, Lucy, that I strongly suspect that both my unhappiness and Mr. Vidal's are equally the growth of your own imagination. At any rate, I do assure you that I am not unhappy at all, and till I have better authority for it than yours, my dear fanciful girl, I shall not think it necessary to be very uneasy on account of Mr. Vidal. And now, Lucy, I think we have sat in the autumn sun long enough, besides I want to practise a song or two with Mrs. Morris, and I have something immensely important to say to Marshall about the dress I intend to wear to-morrow evening."

Lucy was as much provoked as surprised by this light termination of a conversation from which she had anticipated a very different result. Yet she was quite aware that her words respecting young Herbert had produced a strong effect, and one which might be likely enough to help her in her future machinations, for though a little disconcerted by the unexpected self-possession of Mary, she by no means intended to abandon the iniquitous task she had undertaken, nor did she feel much doubt as to

the ultimate success which her use of young Herbert's name would produce.

Yet though steady in purpose, she was strangely vacillating in feeling. Could the marriage of Mary with Vidal be achieved, she thought that it would bring with it advantages sufficient to compensate for the pang which she well knew she should suffer from his marrying any one but herself. The quiet matter-of-fact statement of her lover respecting the smallness of his resources, and the extravagance of his habits, had left a great impression. She, too, had a very decided taste for the luxuries of life; and as she meditated upon his words and manner during her homeward walk that morning, a sort of second-sighted shadowing forth of the manner of man which her beloved might become, if, by an imprudent marriage with her he doomed them both to poverty, had braced her nerves very firmly to the business she was upon. Yet still there were moments when her very soul recoiled from it, and one of these was when the bright eyes of her intended victim flashed upon her, as she rejected the idea of pining under the misery of unrequited love.

Mary had, indeed, looked beautiful at that moment; her beaming eyes, her heightened colour, and the pretty movement of her head and hand, by

which she seemed to throw off from her, as it were, the imputation of such love-sick weakness, grated like the harsh action of a file upon the excitable spirit of the coachman's daughter.

“Must I let him pass his life with such a bright toy as that,” thought she. “If he has her at all, by Heaven she shall be defaced or deformed in some way; or, may she not die? Die, when by force or fraud she may have endowed him for ever and for ever with her wealth?”

Was the face of Lucy beautiful, as the expression of this diabolical idea passed over it?

Yes; as Satan was beautiful, Lucy Dalton might be so too.

CHAPTER X.

NOT particularly well pleased with the result of her conversation with Mary, or at all disposed to meet Vidal at the house of her mother, till she had something more satisfactory to communicate to him, Lucy postponed her preparatory visit to her native cottage till she had dodged the squire from his dog-kennels to his stable, and from his stable to his library, in order to try whether she might not be able to succeed better with the father than with the daughter.

Fortunately for her purpose, Richard Herbert, who shared in most of the squire's morning occupations, was absent upon a scene-painting frolic at the amateur theatre, and her modest knock at the library door having been answered by a ready "come in," she found herself *tête-à-tête* with the old gentleman.

There must have been something very radically

perverse and wicked in the conformation of Lucy Dalton's mind, or she never could so deeply, so implacably have hated a man so greatly in every way her benefactor, and with so very many good and so very few bad qualities as Mr. Clementson; but certain it is, that of all the human beings she had ever seen, she hated him most.

Her evil feelings towards Mary originated altogether in envy; for her memory, retentive enough in hoarding the recollection of every thing which she considered as injury, could conjure up no single instance in which her trusting and affectionate play-fellow had ever intentionally wounded her feelings; nay, there were moments when she would willingly have forgotten, if she could, the accumulated instances of her kind, indulgent, loving nature. But when any such thoughts as these tormented her, she soothed her conscience by the simple process of remembering that Mary Clementson was well-born, and the heiress of seven thousand a year, and Lucy Dalton the penniless offspring of a menial father, and a drunken mother, and then she felt that her hatred to her was but a natural and rational feeling.

But with regard to her father's master, her mother's friendly landlord, and her own generous benefactor,

the case was widely different; for not only was he hateful to her from being rich while she was poor, but from the never-to-be-forgiven fact that he had thought it proper to remember this, though his daughter had upon so many occasions proved that it was possible to forget it; and for this she hated him.

At the very moment of her appearing before him on the present occasion, he committed one of the offences which so often caused her heart to swell and burn within her from an emotion of anger equally impotent and strong. For his salutation was: "Is it you, *Lucy Dalton*. What do you want, my dear girl?"

Had the daughter of a peer been domesticated at Dalbury as the chosen friend of its heiress, such a salutation from the squire would probably have been received with an affectionate smile, as a mark of kindness and paternal familiarity. But it was wormwood to Lucy.

It was not then, and it was not there, however, that she meant to testify the feeling to which it gave rise; on the contrary, she approached the unsuspecting gentleman with an air that spoke of nothing but respectful deference.

"May I speak to you, sir, for a moment?" said she.

“Certainly, my dear, if you wish it. What have you got to say to me?” he replied, “sit down, Lucy, sit down.”

“You must have the great kindness to excuse me, sir, if you think I am taking too great a liberty,” said she. “And I am encouraged to think you *will* excuse me, because it is quite impossible you should mistake my motive. I can have but one, and that is the happiness of my dear, dear young lady,” and Lucy clasped her hands together, and looked imploringly.

“Mary!—the happiness of Mary? Go on, child! What is it you are going to say? What is it you have got to tell me?” cried the anxious father.

“Nothing, sir, that need alarm you,” she replied, “and nothing, as I should think, that can greatly surprise you,” she added, with a smile, “for who can be surprised at a gentleman’s falling in love with Miss Mary?”

“A gentleman in love with her? And who is it, pray! And what have you got to do with it, Lucy Dalton? It is not that tall fellow, I hope, is it, that made such a riot about encoring her singing the other night? The man called Mountroy, or Mountjoy, or Mount something. He that

Sir William said was the owner of such a fine place in Scotland? He shan't have her, Lucy Dalton. And if he has sent you to ask, you may go back and tell him so," and the squire's face became as red as scarlet.

"Oh—no, sir! it is not Mr. Mountjoy, nor any body at all like him. But I should think, sir, you might easily guess. For I don't think any body can help seeing it. The gentleman I mean, is Mr. Vidal."

The squire smiled.

"Why, yes, Miss Lucy Dalton, I don't think it is very difficult to find out that. But what have you got to say about it, my dear? He has not sent you to ask for my consent, has he?" and now the squire gaily laughed outright.

"Oh—no, sir!" replied Lucy, laughing in return, as much as she could venture to do; "of course it is not such a one as I, whom he would choose for a messenger upon such an occasion, though I would gladly serve him in that or any thing else, because I know, oh! so very well, that my dear, darling Miss Mary, has fixed all her hopes of happiness upon him." And now again Lucy looked beseechingly in the face of Mr. Clementson.

A tear glistened in the eye of the tender-hearted squire. "Did Mary bid you come to me to say this?" said he, "but that is not like her, either."

Lucy raised both her hands in deprecation of such a thought.

"No, sir, no!" she replied, earnestly. "Miss Clementson would never do that. She knows her duty better. Nor will she tell you so herself, at least not yet, poor dear! In this respect," continued Lucy, casting down her eyes, "in this respect, all young girls, I suppose, feel the same. There is not one, I think, that would not die, rather than openly confess such a feeling as that, till—till every thing has been fixed and settled for them, and that there is no doubt left."

"Then what is it you do come for, Lucy?" demanded the squire, while a slight shade of impatience crossed his brow.

"Pray do not be angry with me, sir!" she replied, looking excessively timid and frightened. "Perhaps I had better go, and not say what I intended to?" and she rose up.

"Nonsense, Lucy! If you really have got any thing to say, sit still and say it," returned Mr. Clementson, rather impatiently.

"I *have*, sir! I have something on my heart that

I think I ought to say," replied Lucy, raising her fair head with an air of conscious virtue. "And it is not for my pleasure, sir, but for Miss Mary's advantage that I wish to say it. Accident....the accidental overhearing of a conversation, let me into the secret of Mr. Vidal's love for Mary. On this point I will not be more explicit—because I do not choose to compromise any body. But the person to whom Mr. Vidal was speaking, said—'*Take care of yourself, Vidal! It requires no conjuring to discover that the bright eyes of the little Clementson have destroyed your rest, my poor fellow! But take my word for it you have no chance. I know all about your being well born, and well connected, and all the rest of it—but trust me old Clementson will never give his daughter to any but a rich man. People say, indeed, that he is looking out for a nobleman. But if you will take my advice, you will be off as soon as your present engagements in the neighbourhood are over, and try to forget her. It is a devilish disagreeable thing to be refused, Vidal!*'"

"And what did Mr. Vidal say in reply?" demanded the squire, hastily.

"Poor gentleman!" replied Lucy, with a sigh. "It was very melancholy to hear the sound of his voice. '*I will NOT be refused, for I will not offer*

myself,' he replied, '*I could not bear it. I could not bear a refusal.*' "

"What does he expect then that I am to come and offer him my daughter?" replied Mr. Clementson, with a movement of impatience. "What use is there in telling me all this, Lucy? I can do nothing in the matter."

"You are the best judge of that, sir," said Lucy, respectfully, "living on the terms I do with your dear daughter, I cannot be wholly ignorant of what passes in her heart, even on points where it may not be her intention to disclose all that she feels, in short, I cannot help perceiving that she does admire—why should I conceal the truth? that she does love Mr. Vidal too well to see him depart without suffering dreadfully, and, when in addition to this, I discovered that Mr. Vidal was likely to go without her ever having the happiness of knowing that her love was returned, because he was taught to fear you, sir, too much ever to venture upon running the risk of making a proposal, I felt that any rate it would be better to let you know as much as I know myself, and I have been certainly strengthened in this belief by perceiving how greatly Mr. Vidal appears to be admired and respected in the neighbourhood, which is at least a proof that he

is a gentleman of honour, and deserving of some consideration."

"You have done what was quite right, Lucy," said Mr. Clementson, cordially shaking hands with her, "and your conduct on this occasion gives me great pleasure, because it proves to me that by complying with my dear daughter's request to have you always with her, I have given her a friend who may be trusted."

Lucy bent her head and courtesied with an air charmingly blended of respect and gratitude, and having gently glided out of the room, she ran up to her little attic, taking two stairs at a time in order to prepare herself for a walk to the cottage of her mother.

She was in the highest possible spirits: for if she had found the daughter rather restive and skittish under the operation of the leading rein she had attempted to apply to her, the father was evidently inclined, notwithstanding his seeming blustering, to be as docile as a lamb, and she felt perfectly sure that Vidal, by the hints she should give, would have the game in his own hands.

Highly elated by her success, she had no inclination at that moment to dwell upon any of the disagreeable consequences connected with it. She

forgot the bewitching brightness of Mary's eyes, and the hateful possibility that Vidal in some moment of caprice might think them more lovely than her own. All she remembered was that her lover would be the master of Dalbury, and pleasant was the path through its domain which her prophetic fancy sketched for herself.

A quarter of an hour's rapid walking brought her to the door of her mother's cottage, and her heart beat as she entered it, not alone from the rapidity of her walk, but from remembering that she was about for the first time to arrange a place of refuge for her secret meetings with her lover, which would save them both from all the nervous fears of intruding gamekeepers and early sportsmen which had hitherto tormented them, and she rejoiced, deeply rejoiced, as she remembered the struggle she had had with her pride before she could determine to let Vidal know how very lowly her paternal roof had been, that she had conquered it, and she blessed the prescient wisdom which had finally counselled her to let him know *all* at once.

She found her mother, however, in a terrible ill-humour from the length of time which had elapsed since her last visit. Lucy had not now to learn for the first time that it was necessary to keep the

widow Dalton in good-humour if she hoped to enjoy in peace her now settled residence at the ark; and it had been her frequent, though not quite her constant custom to visit her early in the morning, as by so doing she both avoided the degrading spectacle of her drunkenness, which rarely now failed to be visible later in the day, and escaped also the chance of being seen by the neighbours to enter the humble abode of her mother.

But her recent habit of meeting Vidal in the wood before breakfast had interfered with this; and there was so much to be done afterwards, in practising at home, and rehearsing abroad; in arranging old dresses, or imagining new ones, that till she felt how commodious her mother's roof might be to her, she had almost lulled herself into forgetfulness that it existed. But now she came, not only bent upon assuaging the ill-humour which she was sure of meeting, but determined to obtain her object, even at the price of gold, if she could not succeed without it, though few at her age parted with their money so reluctantly.

"So! my fine princess!" exclaimed the red-faced drago, as Lucy entered, and closed the door behind her, "you expect, maybe, that I shall fall down upon my knees to thank you for the honour and glory of your company? But I'll tell

you what, Miss Lucy, I have ten times a greater fancy to knock you down instead—and would it not be serving you right, you undutiful minx? What! you are grown too grand, I trow, to show folks that you are your mother's daughter any longer!—hey? Your head is turned, isn't it, with your ball goings and your play actings? And how long, in the devil's name, do you think I'll bear it? How long, my fine lady, d'ye think it will be before I turn it round again upon your shoulders? And if I did happen to crack your neck in the doing it, how much less of child's love and duty would there be in the world? Can your ladyship be pleased to tell me that?"

"It is no good for you to go on bullying me in this way, mother," said Lucy, having listened to her for some time with a greater appearance of patience than usual; "for if you scold from this time to this time twelvemonth, you won't be able to put more than twenty-four hours into one day. You don't suppose I am to be kept up at the park for nothing, do you? If you do, I only just wish you would prove it, that's all; for I am tired to death of having to come here, and go there, at every body's bidding. It's all very well to be called Miss Dalton, and to get my dinners and

suppers scot free, to say nothing of my clothing; but my legs and my fingers, too, pay for it, I can tell you, if your allowance doesn't."

This was most completely untrue in every way, for the heiress of Dalbury did a great deal more in the way of attendance upon the coachman's daughter, than the coachman's daughter did in attendance upon her. However, this was one of the facts which it was pretty nearly impossible for the widow Dalton to find out, and it was, therefore, precisely the sort of statement which it was most convenient to make.

But it did not satisfy the old woman in her present humour, and she replied to it by saying: "Then, by the living Jingo, I will make them pay me wages for it! Play is play; and as long as you did nothing else, I let them go on, and said nothing. But if you are put to work, girl, it shall be for me. What am I the better for their calling you miss? If really and truly they mean one of these days to make you a lady outright, why don't they invite your own mother to come and see it. Why, too, is my own flesh and blood to be kept from me? If you can't come to me, Miss Lucy, I'll show them that I can come to you; and it maybe, if they don't behave so as to pleasure me, I may give them

a little more of my company than is agreeable. The servants have had orders to keep me at arm's length. I know all that; and upon the false pretence, too, of my sometimes taking a drop too much, which is just as great a lie as that they are any of them too good, for I never take a single thimbleful more than my poor stomach downright requires. But that's no matter; it is no business of theirs if I do. Neither father nor daughter, ever gave me a penny to pay for it—and I'm not going to ask 'em. But what I am going to ask is, for your wages, Miss Lucy Dalton, and that I'll have, till such time as you are of age, or my name is not Margaret Dalton, and it would be queer if I had blundered about my name, you know, because *I* have had nothing to turn my head since first I got it."

Rarely in the course of Lucy's short life had her bold spirit been so completely daunted as at that moment. She knew her mother too well to feel any doubt of her executing her threat, unless some effectual means were at once resorted to, in order to prevent it. She had never told her mother of the pecuniary arrangements which had been made upon her having been installed as a regular inmate at the park, and she could only suppose that her angry parent had guessed the truth or something like it

from the greatly improved style of her dress. Till this arrangement had been made, there had always been a certain subordination of style in the dress of Lucy, when compared to that of her young mistress, even when wearing the very same garments, perhaps, which the heiress had worn before; but now her general appearance was completely altered, and *Dalberina* was frequently less smart than her confidant.

This truth flashed at once upon the mind of Lucy, and bitterly did she lament the want of caution which had led to such a display of her wealth. But how was the danger to be averted? It was not the fear lest her salary, or any part of it, should pass into the hands of her mother, which thus alarmed her; that would have been bad enough, but it was nothing in comparison of the still greater danger which threatened her, should her terrible mother really attack the squire with a demand for her WAGES! Nothing, she was quite sure, would induce him to retain her afterwards as the drawing-room companion of his daughter, and as a guest who was to be introduced by him to the ladies of the neighbourhood, as proper society for them also.

His well-known horror of the widow Dalton's former visitations at the park had led to the system

of caution, which had of late almost entirely prevented them. But if she once got it into her head that her daughter's residence there gave her a claim to *wages*, not only would her visits be renewed, but in a style that must infallibly lead to the utter destruction of all Lucy's hopes.

For a minute or two the beautiful girl stood before her mother as if she had been planet-struck. The widow Dalton laughed. "What! your ladyship doesn't like the notion of my applying to your ladyship's master for your ladyship's wages?" said she. "Of course, I am very sorry for that, but it's not to be helped or altered, I promise you. So now you may go back to your grandcur, Miss Lucy Dalton, and I will have the honour of returning your call very soon, as polite as possible, my dear. What d'ye stand there for, girl, looking like a stuck pig? Be off! I am busy. It is time that I should set about making myself smart for my visit."

The hard-featured virago was quite in earnest. Her daughter looked at her, and saw that she was so. There was no time to be lost.

"Sit down, mother, will you?" said Lucy, setting her the example, and smiling up at her with an expression of light-hearted glee, as foreign from her heart as holy thoughts of heaven. "Sit down, mo-

ther, and just listen to what I have got to say to you, and then, perhaps, you may not be quite so angry with me."

Had Lucy burst into tears, and attempted to soften the sturdy obstinacy of her mother's heart by entreaties, she would probably only have confirmed her purpose. But now her curiosity was awakened, and having set her arms *a kimbo*, and looked at her daughter for a moment with an expression that was half anger and half admiration, she complied with her request, placed herself in a chair opposite to her, and, resting her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, said, "Set off, then, my lady, and let us hear some of your grand adventures."

Some "grand adventure" was absolutely necessary to turn the dangerous direction of the widow Dalton's thoughts; and Lucy knew that she must invent something that might keep her quiet. The danger that any falsehoods told now might lead to trouble hereafter, was too distant and too dimly seen to be put in comparison with her present terror, and she therefore boldly said, "Mother dear, I am going to be married; and now tell me what you will say to that?"

And how long has that been settled, Miss Dut-

ful?" replied Mrs. Dalton, her state of mind, however, evidently beginning to soften.

"Why, now, this very moment, almost, I might say," replied Lucy, "and a marriage it will be, mother, if we can go through with it, that will put you in cotton for life, and, what you will like better still, perhaps, it will make you hold up your head as high as the squire himself. He would have got the gentleman for Miss Mary, if he could, I promise you; and that's the very point that makes the difficulty."

"The difficulty? Why you don't mean that the squire wants to run away with a gentleman by force, in order to make him marry his daughter? That's not over likely, is it? I should think the girl wasn't come to that condition yet."

"That's not quite it, mother!" returned Lucy, laughing. (Had she looked vexed, or put out, at that moment, she had been lost.) "That's not it, my good mother. The squire won't run away with him. He would find that rather a hard job. But the young gentleman is a cousin, and the squire watches him as a cat watches a mouse, and what we are afraid of is, that he will be sending off word to his family, and so stop our marriage at once, before we can have had time or opportunity to settle any

thing. I am not twenty-one yet, mother, by a great deal, you know, and therefore we must be married by banns, and you must go with us, mother, dear, to stay the time out in some far off parish. But he will take care to make you comfortable, for my sake. And I have told him all about you, and that you were to live like a lady all the rest of your days. ‘*And how else,*’ said he, ‘*do you think I would let my wife’s mother live?*’ So there will be no trouble about that, dear mother; but the trouble is, the danger we every minute run if we speak to one another. You never saw any body watched as he is, since you were born. He gets so angry sometimes, that I am in the greatest fright for fear he should set off. And then what is to become of us, for his people will be sure to hear about me, and they will take care that he shall never come near me again!”

And here Lucy thought it right to weep a little, and her pocket handkerchief was drawn out for the purpose.

“Never you frighten yourself about that, Lucy—keep up a good heart, girl, and we’ll carry the matter through in spite of ’em all. Does Miss Mary know any thing about it?” said Mrs. Dalton.

“ Not a word, mother ! All is safe as yet. Nobody guesses that it has come to an offer, nor any thing like it. The old ladies, the governesses, you know have been making their impertinent observations about *some people being in luck to be so much admired*. I know what it all means; but I say nothing. The great difficulty, mother, is how to get a quiet half hour for us to speak to one another, for though he has made me an offer of marriage as honourable and distinct as it was possible for a gentleman to speak, we were interrupted before I could make a word of answer, and the next time we got a minute behind the folding screen in the library, I said that about you, and then in bounced the French mademoiselle. Oh, mother ! you can't think how horrid it is to be so bothered. And then the danger, you know, of its all being broke off if it is found out.”

“ It must NOT be found out, girl. You must both of you mind that, whatever you do, for if it is, I know what will come next—they will be after bringing him or his people here, some unlucky day, just to prove that I am not the proper sort of body to make a lady of, and that would be no proof neither; for only just set me up properly, and you shall see, all of you, that there is more in me

than you think for," said the widow, with great energy.

"There is nobody, mother," returned Lucy, "who can do so much to prevent its being found out, as your own self. If you would only manage to let us meet, for half an hour or so, quietly here—to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, we should be able to settle every thing, and go back to them all at the park so quiet and composed, without being any longer obliged to torment ourselves by seeking stolen opportunities for speaking to each other; will you do this dear mother?"

"Yes, girl, I will," replied Mrs. Dalton, her temper evidently restored to its very nearest approach to good-humour. "But what will your gentleman think of your old mother, Lucy? Won't he be frightened from his good intentions by seeing such a figure as this?"

"Listen, mother," returned Lucy, in a tone a great deal more beguiling than any of mere coaxing could have been, for it was the tone of real earnest business. "Listen, dear mother, and you will find that I have not forgotten any thing. You are quite right about his not seeing you in this dress, nor indeed in any other that you have got. I have thought of that, I promise you, and, therefore, you

must not be at home, mother dear, either to-morrow, or any other day till I have been able to get you a dress, from top to toe, that shall make you look like a lady—and a lady you shall be, as soon as my hand is joined to his, or I will see the reason why. What you must do, mother, is to make this room as neat and decent as you can, and you must let me have the key, for you know you have only got to pull the door after you to make it shut safe enough, if you unhook the bolt of the lock behind. And when you have done this, dear mother, you may go to the ‘Queen’s Head,’ if you like it, and chat away the time for an hour or so. Look here, I have got half-a-crown left out of the money the squire gave me to buy some decent things. That will pay, you know, for any thing you may like to take. And I will hook back the lock again when I go, leaving the key in the inside, and the door on the latch, against you come back. Will you do all this for me, mother dear?” and she gave the old woman what seemed to be a very loving kiss.

“Yes, Lucy, I have no objection to any of it, only I should like to be quite sure,” added the widow Dalton, after thinking for a moment in silence. “I should like to be quite sure, Lucy, that you would be safe with the gentleman; young girls sometimes are terrible thoughtless.”

“Do you think that I should be likely to be one of the thoughtless young girls, mother?” said Lucy, with a sly sort of smile, “especially with such a match before my eyes? What do you think of it, mother, eh?”

“No, girl, I don’t think you would,” replied the mother, laughing; “and, at any rate, I don’t very well see what else there is to be done.”

“There is nothing else to be done, nothing in the world,” replied Lucy, highly delighted at the successful issue of her visit; “now give me another kiss, and I’ll be off.”

The mother laid her heavy, coarse hands upon the delicate shoulders of her child, and looking at her fair face with a good deal of maternal admiration, said,

“You are fit to be the bride of a king, girl, if beauty was all he wanted. But you have not told me the name of the gentleman yet. What is my handsome daughter to be called when she is a real lady?”

“And that’s a secret I dare not tell for my life,” replied Lucy, again kissing her mother hastily, but with both a joyous and caressing manner. “I have promised your son that is to be, that his name should never pass my lips till we were safe, quite,

quite safe, mother, from the possibility of danger from its being spoken. And you cannot blame him for that, mother! It only shows how much in earnest he is. Good bye; make the room look as nice as you can, and put plenty of sweet flowers in the two flower-pots. Good bye!" and taking the key from the lock as she spoke, the beautiful Lucy left the cottage without waiting for further parley.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR some minutes after Lucy left him, the worthy squire of Dalbury remained sitting in his elbow-chair, in deep meditation. Some people may think, perhaps, that he was ruminating, with a little anxiety, upon the statement he had just heard respecting the condition of his daughter's heart, or upon the great uncertainty in which he found himself with regard to the family and fortune of the gentleman whom he had learned was so passionately attached to her, and for whom she had conceived so very strong an affection in return.

But no such thoughts occupied him for a moment. Lord Randal's introduction and evident intimacy with Mr. Vidal, was evidence most perfectly satisfactory to Mr. Clementson, of his being a gentleman. And as to his fortune, which point was, in fact, the real object of all his anxiety, his only

fear was that it might prove so large, or so unfortunately burdened by a favourite mansion, as to make his own determination that Mary should never leave him as long as he lived, a fatal stumbling block.

Mr. Clementson, notwithstanding the disappointment of his first love, and the early loss of his second, was of so very joyous and happy a temperament, that any thing like prolonged anxiety was intolerable to him. He therefore resolved at once to ascertain how far the inferences and conjectures of Lucy Dalton were correct respecting the state of Mr. Vidal's affections.

As to the feelings of his Mary respecting him, he had, as we know, fancied himself acquainted with them for some time past. Her openly expressed admiration for the gentleman on some occasions, and her bright blushes on others, when some of that fascinating man's habitual love-makings were bestowed on her, had left him little or no doubt as to the truth of the confidant's statement respecting her.

As far as respected the question as to whether Mary was to be made happy in her own way, he had long ago made up his mind. No consideration on earth would have been strong enough to induce

him to oppose her wishes, short of believing that the indulgence of them would *certainly* make her miserable.

And even on all the ordinary points to which a father would be likely to look, in order to ascertain, as far as he could, whether all things promised well, he was perhaps less anxious than most men, from believing that by care, forethought, and all the precautions they could suggest, he might still so far retain the power of guarding her from danger, that it would be safer for her happiness to trust to this, than to disappoint her young affections by waiting, vainly perhaps at last, to discover whether the man she loved were as perfect as herself.

All this, however, was only his general theory, and had been long ago fixed firmly in his mind as a leading article in his manual of paternal wisdom. But in the case of Mr. Vidal, he felt that no such considerations were necessary in order to induce him to consent to his daughter's marriage with him. The sort of universal homage which appeared offered to him by the whole neighbourhood, together with the imposing tone of conscious, yet gentle and graceful superiority which rendered his manners at once so dignified, and so attractive, threw all doubt respecting his merits as a man of honour and

high character, to a distance that was quite out of sight.

No difficulties therefore of that sort embarrassed him.

But how was he to open the negotiation? There was, he could not deny it, some little difficulty here. Less, however, greatly less to Mr. Clementson, than there would have been to most men. Few gentlemen in his station in life, had mixed less in general society than he had done. He was as little a man of the world as Parson Adams himself, and in many respects his character rested altogether upon the simple, native, unsophisticated qualities of his heart. John Jonas Clementson was, at fifty-five, very like what John Jonas Clementson had been at fifteen—kind-hearted, affectionate, cheerful, and generous.

Almost the only thing approaching to worldly wisdom which he had acquired, was a comfortable consciousness of the value of a good estate. Had it not been for this, he might, perhaps, have been a diffident man, which now he was not. But in that case his diffidence would not have proceeded from shyness; he was ever thinking too much about the *agreeableness* of other people, and too little about his own, to have rendered this possible. But it might have arisen from feeling that he

had not as much power as he wished, to be kind and generous to every body.

As it was, however, he had this power, and it warmed, as well as cheered his heart, whenever he thought of it. And upon the present occasion it suggested to him a line of conduct which had more of fearless confidence, mixed with a little conscious superiority, than of worldly usage, or of worldly prudence in it. In short he determined upon seeking a conversation with Mr. Vidal, for the purpose of ascertaining beyond the possibility of doubt whether he really was very much in love with his Mary or not. He had no fear whatever of being deluded in that matter. He knew too well what it was to love Mary as a father, not to be sharp-sighted on that point. And if the man did seem properly and sufficiently miserable, he thought it would not be difficult to give him enough encouragement to set things going, in a way to make his darling as happy as her own little heart could wish.

Had Squire Clementson taken it into his head, that it would be better to take another look into the heart of Mary, before he attempted to sound the depths of that belonging to Mr. Vidal, it might have been better. But in the first place, he truly believed that he knew all about Mary's heart

already. And in the next, he could not bear the thought of making her blush and tremble before him. No! She should be made happy, and in her own way too, without having any thing to plague her, from the beginning to the end of it.

In consequence of all these meditations, Mr. Clementson, of Dalbury Park, sat down and wrote the following note to Mr. Vidal, of, of Europe.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“You were asking me some questions the other day respecting our manner of feeding eels in the preserves. If Mr. Norman has not bedded you too firmly into his geological rock, I wish you would ride over here to-morrow morning, when I think I could show you the whole process very conveniently. I shall be on the ground with my men about twelve—and having shown you how the eels eat their luncheon, we shall be very happy to show you how we eat ours afterwards.

“Yours very faithfully,

“JOHN JONAS CLEMENTSON.”

The heart of Vidal leaped as he read this epistle. He remembered well, most particularly well, every word which Lucy had said to him respecting her

purposed plan of operations. He remembered that she had first to seek an interview with the little heiress, and probe the state of her heart respecting him; and, if it was such as they hoped and expected, she was then to see Mr. Clementson, and communicate the state of the case to him.

“And then,” Lucy had said (for he remembered her very words), “and then the worthy gentleman will seek an interview with you.” The interview was now sought. On that point there could be no doubt. And might not all the rest be taken for granted?

He thought so.

He knew Lucy well enough to feel pretty certain that if any circumstance unfavourable to their hopes occurred, some little village urchin would have been found to convey an intimation of it to the Fairy Ring; and as no such intimation had reached him, he felt very much as if he were about to take possession of Dalbury Park, without let or hindrance of any kind.

And Clara Maynard?

Her image rose before him, and not the less lovely, because he felt that an *imperious destiny* compelled him to resign her.

As to any difficulty likely to arise from the

disagreeable necessity of dismissing her from the enviable situation of wife-presumptive to the fascinating Vidal, he feared it not. But he was sorry for her; he was sorry for himself! She was so admirably well suited to him in person, manners, deportment, and talent! would have been so exactly the sort of person to escort to the opera with credit; to drive in the park with *éclat*, and to take with him on many of his visitings with advantage!

But she had not two parks, two mansions, and seven thousand a year to embellish them. If she had; notwithstanding the irresistible fascinations of his Lucy (which he trusted would not last long, for they really engrossed his faculties too much), notwithstanding his present passionate devotion to her, he felt convinced that had blind fortune only favoured Clara as she had favoured the much less lovely Mary, nothing would have shaken his constancy!

But as it was, he was engaged to pass that evening at the Town Head House; and he must contrive to sow the seeds of a quarrel! He was really sorry for it, very sorry: he told himself so again and again. But to avoid it, was utterly impossible; and he sighed like a deeply disappointed lover, as he set off on foot (after sharing the snug

dinner and coffee of Mr. Norman), determined not to return till he had made the beautiful, the incomparable Clara too angry with him to leave the least probability that he should ever set off upon the same walk again.

It did not escape him, however, that it was just possible that both he and his Lucy, too, might be mistaken, and that if such were the case, he should certainly be desirous of reverting to his engagement with Miss Maynard, several little family circumstances having been mentioned in his *tête-à-tête* conversations with Mr. Norman, which suggested the idea of more than one contingency in favour of that young lady.

But this consideration in no degree troubled him. He even smiled at the idea that any woman, whom he had once permitted to love him, should ever so far recover her freedom, as to fly from him, past the reach of being recalled. No! Poor Clara! He must set her free. But it should be no farther than a wanton's bird. And with this thought in his heart, and Dalbury Park in his head, he entered the usual sitting-room of the Town Head House; looking, as he was sadly afraid, as handsome as ever. Poor Clara! But how could he help it?

Clara and Miss Anne Jenkins were sitting there

tête-à-tête, and they both of them blushed as he entered. Clara from the consciousness, that though he was expected, she was not at that moment thinking of him. And Miss Anne, because she had not even yet quite forgotten how very disagreeable it was to have a third person in the room, when one particularly wished for a *tête-à-tête*. Mr. Vidal was as usual all grace, all delicate observance, and tender solicitude. "Was she quite well? Would Miss Anne pledge her word to the precious assurance, that Clara had caught no cold at Lady Thompson's archery breakfast?"

Miss Anne declared herself very particularly ready to pledge her word to this effect. And then starting up very suddenly, she exclaimed, "Oh! dear me! What a careless creature I am, to be sure! Only think, Clara, of my having left the great garden-gate open! I have, indeed, I am perfectly sure of it, my dear. You must please to excuse me, Mr. Vidal; but we never do leave that gate open; we make a point of it. Elizabeth would be so vexed with me!"

These words, rather rapidly uttered, lasted her from the window to the door; having reached which, she turned round, gave them a nod, and vanished, leaving them, as she hoped and believed, in a state of perfect felicity.

Clara was seated at the same little work-table where we found her a few eventful weeks before, when Mr. Vidal made his first visit to Miss Jenkins.

He drew a chair towards it, and placed himself close beside her. He looked earnestly at her, and remembered the doubts which had arisen within him at that first visit, as to whether even her beauty could stand the very severe simplicity of her toilet. Those doubts returned upon him now, and he did not now discourage them. Indeed, he was almost angry at her running the risk of meeting his eye, enamoured as she believed it to be, with so little caution.

“ Lucy is lovelier—Lucy is more impassioned—Lucy is more attractive,” was the inward soliloquy which followed that earnest look.

And then his eye turned upon the grass-plot and the mulberry-tree, and then it wandered round the room, and he thought of the satin hangings of Dalbury Park, as he looked at the faded chintz, and well-washed but much-worn sofa cover, of the late Lady Arabella’s favourite morning room.

And then he looked at Clara again, and said to her: “ I am come, my beloved, to announce what I hope you will hear rather with gladness than sorrow; I am come, dearest, to tell you that circum-

stances will, I fear, oblige me to leave this neighbourhood immediately and—”

Here he paused for a moment, and Clara innocently said:

“Why should you suppose that I should hear this with pleasure, Mr. Vidal?”

“Because, my lovely Clara,” he replied, “it comes accompanied with the announcement that we must be united immediately;” and he threw his audacious arm around her as he spoke, with a degree of freedom which he had never used before.

Clara disengaged herself, and moved her chair, saying gravely: “Of course we shall all be sorry for your departure, Mr. Vidal. But it is quite impossible that this should hasten our marriage.”

“Impossible!” cried he, starting up, drawing himself to his greatest height, and looking at her with vehement indignation. “Impossible, Miss Maynard? Impossible that my sudden departure for London should induce you to comply with my most reasonable request, that you would give me your hand immediately? Do I understand you rightly?”

“Most certainly I said so,” said Clara, gently; “and I think a moment’s reflection would convince you that I am right. A moment’s reflection, per-

haps, would enable you to recall more than one circumstance connected with my little property, which, as my aunt Elizabeth explained to you, would render several months' delay necessary."

"Necessary for guarding your property, Miss Maynard, against the possibility of its either serving my wants or my wishes. Such cautiousness, pardon me, is equally unworthy of us both. And permit me to add, that if fortune had been my object, I should not have placed myself within reach of the suspicions or the precautions of your aunt."

Clara looked at him earnestly for a moment, evidently as much surprised as offended by his words and manner, and then she went on with the needlework upon which she was employed, without replying a word, or giving any indication whatever of the effect produced by his eloquence.

Vidal got up and walked up and down the room, seeming to struggle with his indignant feelings.

"You tell me, Miss Maynard," he resumed, "that an immediate marriage is impossible. What, then, may I not expect when I add, that I consider it to be very desirable for my interest that, for a time at least, it should be strictly secret also? I came here, Clara, determined to propose to you a step which will certainly put your affection for me to the test;

but which you will not refuse if you love me, as I hope you do. I come, Clara, to implore you to elope with me this night—this very night, dearest Clara, and without permitting your aunts to guess in what direction we go.”

Clara again suspended her needle for a moment, and again looked up at him, but she appeared to think he had not finished speaking, and she said nothing, but quietly resumed her employment.

Mr. Vidal, however, thought he had said enough; and suddenly standing still, immediately opposite to her, seemed to await her answer.

But still Clara spoke not. Perhaps she was afraid to trust her voice. Neither, at that moment, did she again look up. Perhaps she was conscious that there was a tear in her eye. But whatever the emotion produced by the harangue she had listened to might be, it did not overpower her long; for, before Mr. Vidal moved from the position he had taken before her little work-table, she conquered it sufficiently both to look up and to speak; and then she said:

“I do not think, Mr. Vidal, that you can be in any great doubt as to the nature of the answer I am likely to give to your proposal. But if you are, I will at once remove it. If our union depend upon

my complying with this proposal, Mr. Vidal, it cannot take place. Neither do I believe my aunt Elizabeth would consent to any hurry in the business; nor will I consent to do any thing in opposition to her wishes."

"And this, then, is the love you bear me!" he replied, in an accent of passionate indignation. "But perhaps it is well, Clara, that I have discovered in time how little you are inclined to give, in return for the boundless affection I have shown you! True it is, indeed, most true, that you neither are nor can be aware of the imprudent strength of attachment which I have demonstrated in offering you my hand. You cannot know this, and therefore it is impossible you can appreciate the strength of the passion which has actuated me. But you have now taught me, Clara, that I must struggle with this passion, even if the doing so costs me my life! And dreadful, indeed, is what I suffer at this moment!"

And here again he walked up and down the room with long and rapid strides. But no more tears came into Clara's eyes; she was thinking at that moment that her fate was a strange one, for she was driven to believe that the silence of Arthur Lexington had in it something that she could inore

easily mistake for love than she found in all the vehemence of Theodore Vidal, and then she almost smiled in bitterness as she told herself how very idle it was to make comparisons between the degrees of attachment of two men, who, in different ways, had so clearly proved to her that they really had no attachment to her at all.

“And this is your final answer,” said Vidal, again stopping short in his walk, “and here, Clara, it is your will that we should part? Nay; speak, Miss Maynard! Am I to consider myself as a rejected man?”

“I wish you to consider, Mr. Vidal, that in what I have said to you I have spoken my real feelings and intentions,” replied Clara.

And then Mr. Vidal struck his forehead with his hand, threw his handsome head back, and fixed his eyes with a very despairing expression upon the ceiling of the room, of all of which Clara was quite aware, though she did not exactly look up.

After a few seconds thus spent, Mr. Vidal seemed to make an effort to compose himself. He pressed both his hands strongly against his fine broad chest, relieved his heart in some slight degree by a heavy sigh, and then once again drew near to Miss Maynard, and looked at her with theatrical earnestness for a moment.

“Clara!” he said, in a voice of the deepest tenderness, “Clara! ever lovely, and, I greatly fear, ever to be beloved, these moments are too terribly painful to last. What they may be to you, I know not. To me, they are like the tearing of soul and body asunder! I cannot bear it! If they last, I am undone!” He stopped, and seemed almost to gasp for breath.

“It is a frightful necessity, sweet Clara that forbids me, from feelings of honour, too refined, perhaps, to be guided by without a penalty in this miserable world of ours, it is most painful that feelings of honour prevent my explaining to you at length my most peculiar, and most embarrassing situation. But I may not do it. I will only say that did you know all, you would honour me, and that were my connexions less distinguished, or my fortune more independent, I should not have been driven to have made you the rash proposal you have heard this night! You have, perhaps, treated me with some harshness, which has not been altogether deserved. But no matter. Perhaps the remembrance of it may be useful to me. There is now but one point, Clara, upon which I will still venture a request, and whatever my enforced concealments may lead you to think of me, my opinion of your

moral qualities is such as to make me feel perfectly secure that you will grant it. My position, though it may be a brilliant one, is still very precarious, and nothing would be so likely to destroy my hopes of its eventually becoming what I wish, as your publishing the particulars of what has passed between us. It must be best for both of us that the rumour which may have arisen about us should die away, which it infallibly will do, if not kept alive by imprudent disclosures, either on your side or mine. May I ask you, Miss Maynard, to promise me that our unfortunate, and short-lived engagement shall rest a secret? And may I ask the same promise from your aunts?"

All this was said in a tone of the most profound melancholy, excepting the last sentence, and in the delivery of that there was a sort of business-like intonation, which Clara seemed to catch as she replied,

"You may be quite easy on that point, Mr. Vidal, and might believe, I think, even without my assurance to that effect, that neither my good aunts nor myself, are at all likely to feel any pleasure, either in remembering, or in publishing, what has passed between us."

"I thank you," he replied solemnly; and, again

sighing profoundly, seemed to be preparing to take his leave; but, having taken up his hat and stick, he paused, and then added, rather plaintively, "I have—not another favour to ask. No! that is over for ever. But I would ask a question. Tell me, Miss Maynard, and tell me with all your usual admirable sincerity, has any thing which has yet passed between us, been spoken of by you, or your aunts, in the neighbourhood?"

"Never, Mr. Vidal," replied Clara.

"And I have your promise that it never shall?" said he, "either by you or by them?"

"You have, sir," she said, bowing her beautiful head to him, as she sat at her work.

"Now then!" he exclaimed, "it is time that I should tear myself from you! Heaven, for ever and for ever, bless you, loveliest Clara! And be assured, that let my future fate be what it may, it is here that I would have wished to live for ever!"

And as he spoke, he dropped very gracefully upon one knee, seized her hand, pressed it to his lips and to his heart—recovered his feet with a sort of convulsive spring, that seemed like a movement of mortal agony, and was out of the room in a moment.

CHAPTER XII.

WE may now attend our hero to his interview with Mr. Clementson, which took place on the morning following that which has been described in the foregoing chapter. Precisely punctual to the hour of twelve, Mr. Vidal walked across the park to the door of the house which opened upon the cloisters, just as the squire was about to enter it, in order to wait his arrival.

“Ah! Mr. Vidal, you are a punctual man, I see. So much the better, sir, so much the better. Punctuality, and early rising, are the best specifics I am acquainted with for lengthening life. Father Mathew and the water doctors are nothing to them. We will go and look after the eels immediately; but come with me for five minutes first, into my library, will you?”

Mr. Vidal bowed a smiling acquiescence, and

prepared to follow his host, who with a firm, but rapid step, preceded him through the well-fitted up billiard-room and handsome hall, into the nobly large, and nobly furnished apartment he had named.

But rapid as the step was, the still more rapid faculties of Vidal had opportunity to observe in the most satisfactory manner the excellent style of every object that he passed.

Yes, that was precisely the kind of dwelling calculated to suit him as a country residence. And, after all, it was impossible to deny that at thirty-seven it might be more agreeable to enjoy the celebrated English *vie de château* in one's own mansion, than to have the trouble of for ever seeking it at that of a friend.

"Sit down, Mr. Vidal, sit down here. This is a pleasant window. I like nothing better in the way of a home landscape, than the sight of my own oaks, with a good wide stretch of green sward under them, and a fine herd of fallow deer to nibble it into good order," said the squire.

Mr. Vidal looked out of the window with great civility, and very honestly agreed in the opinion that the view was a pleasant one. But he began to suspect that the worthy gentleman felt rather at a loss how to enter upon the subject which it was

his purpose to discuss. On every other imaginable occasion, the ready tact and charming manners of Vidal, made the assisting an embarrassed companion out of such a dilemma, an easy task. But now he knew not even how to set about it, and he was beginning to feel a little fidgetty, as Mr. Clementson, turning from the oaks and the deer, began to select for his amusement one or two handsome volumes of highly-finished illustrations which lay upon the table, when he was relieved from his fears that after all, he might really be taken to see the eels fed, by the worthy squire's suddenly pushing away a third red and gold quarto that he had seized upon, and with rather a desperate effort, beginning as follows:—

“Mr. Vidal,—elderly gentlemen, whether they are fathers, uncles, or guardians, are apt, I believe, and as you probably know, to look sharply about them, if they happen to see a tolerably pretty and tolerably wealthy daughter, niece, or ward, as the case may be, dancing and talking rather often with so—so distinguished a gentleman as you are, Mr. Vidal.”

Mr. Vidal coloured, and bent his head rather stiffly.

“Now don't fancy, my good sir,” said the squire,

“ that I am going to attack you with the fierceness of an old dragon mounting guard, because you have paid my dear Mary the compliment of dancing with her. I assure you, on the contrary, that I should have been a little mortified if you had not. And it is not paying you a bad compliment, you know, if I confess that I should not wish, if you have no intentions beyond being her partner in a waltz, to see her distinguished by you in this way too constantly.”

Mr. Clementson ceased, and Mr. Vidal answered him with all the graceful fluency of a man endowed by nature with the power of speech in a very high degree of perfection, and with the consummate skill in the management of his own affairs, which he also possessed in so very pre-eminent a degree.

After thanking his amiable host for the kind frankness of the manner in which he had spoken to him, he went on thus.

“ Do not believe it possible, Mr. Clementson, that any man of common feeling, and ordinary observation can fail to appreciate the kind and gentle manner in which you execute the sacred duties of a father, and protector, to the sweetest treasure that ever fell to the task of mortal man to

guard. And now, my dear sir, though hardly privileged to do so, I cannot resist the inclination I feel to speak to you with the same openness and candour with which you have spoken to me. You must not blame me, you must not deem me presumptuous for doing so—for I am led to it by a spontaneous sort of feeling which I cannot resist. You have alluded to the truth, Mr. Clementson, with so much delicacy, that it is impossible I should be otherwise than grateful. In naming my attentions to your daughter, you name, in fact, something very different from mere *attention*. You name, or rather you allude to, a sentiment on my part which, thus challenged, I will not scruple to confess it, occupies my whole soul. I love your daughter, Mr. Clementson, I love her passionately, devotedly. For the first time in my life this powerful, alas! this too powerful sentiment has seized upon, conquered, and enslaved me! I know that my fortune is not adequate to hers. I know that in that respect, I am no proper match for Miss Clementson. And I had resolved. Ah! Mr. Clementson, how vain are the resolutions of man!—but most surely I *had* resolved, when one or two of the charming little *fêtes* in which I have engaged myself should be over, most surely I had resolved to tear myself

away, and leave all that I most loved to look upon —for ever!"

Mr. Vidal as he spoke these last words become strongly affected. He rested his elbow upon a table near him, and supported his fine high forehead with his hand.

Mr. Clementson was a good deal affected too. But he blew his nose, hemmed lustily, and then said:

"No, no, my good sir; let us decide upon nothing in a hurry. Wise men, you know, never do. Perhaps after all, my good friend, it may not be necessary for you to run away. Your determination to do it, however, was very noble, and does you infinite honour. It speaks volumes in your praise. I am very much pleased with the motive, very much indeed, and it gives me great pleasure to say, that, perhaps, there may be no occasion for your doing so. But it is scarcely necessary that I should tell you how completely every thing depends upon Mary herself. I too, love that little girl, Mr. Vidal," and here the good squire fairly broke down, and very nearly sobbed, but recovering himself after again using his Bandanna vigorously, he continued: "It is Mary, sir, it is she who must settle this question for you. If she does not like you, why, per-

haps, you had better go, for in that case the more you see of her the worse it will be for you. But if she wishes you to stay, why then stay, Mr. Vidal, stay in Heaven's name."

"Mr. Clementson, I cannot answer you. My heart is on my lips, but it seems dumb," cried Vidal, clasping his hands and raising them heavenward, "but let your heart answer for mine; you, who best know the angel my soul doats upon, can best judge what my feelings are at this moment. May I indeed see her—speak to her—confess to her the love she has inspired? Oh, say but that I may, and I will bless you!"

"Yes, my dear friend," replied the well-pleased squire, with a smile beaming with all that is best and kindest in the heart of man. "I see nothing against it, Mr. Vidal, nothing whatever. I have a very great regard, sir, for my Lord Randal, and I feel quite sure you would not be on the terms you are with him did you not deserve all the good-will and affection which you have excited in this neighbourhood. But you must let me speak to my dear girl first, Mr. Vidal, I will not let any one startle and surprise her but myself, I have been both father and mother to her, my good friend, for many a year, and I watch over her pretty tenderly, I believe.

But before I leave you in order to open this business to her, there is one point upon which I must just say a few words. You don't happen to have any particularly favourite mansion, do you, Mr. Vidal? Whether it is large or small, you know, it may be a favourite. You don't happen to possess any residence that you are particularly attached to, do you, my dear sir?"

Vidal, notwithstanding all his Vidalism, felt a little embarrassed by this question; but he recovered himself in a moment, and replied, with a voice and manner inexpressibly ingenuous and engaging, "Alas! no, Mr. Clementson! I can boast of no such precious possession. A favourite mansion is a good that the gods have denied me."

"I am heartily glad to hear it, sir, very heartily glad to hear it, indeed. This removes at once what I have always felt might be one of the greatest difficulties in any marriage I might consent to for Mary. And if there be no such stumbling-block as a favourite house, my dear Vidal, I flatter myself that the next thing I may have to say to you won't prove much of a stumbling-block either. But at any rate it is best that I should state it honestly and openly at once. Mary and I must never be parted, Mr. Vidal. We have both, long ago, quite made up our minds

upon that. I have besides this house, which, as you perceive, is a tolerably comfortable one, another place, a good deal smaller than this, where we always go for a few weeks every year, and when Mary is married she must do so still, for it has always been the jointure house when there was a son, you know, to take this one instead of a daughter, and there is many an old body living upon the estate now, who has known the *clemency*, as an old joker used to say of a dowager *Clementson*, and, therefore, we must not leave the good people altogether without having the benefit of a visit from us once a year. But whether at Dalbury Park, or at Clementson Hall, *Mary and I must be in the same house*. And this, I believe, is the severest condition annexed to the Dalbury and Southwold property, which will, of course, be yours in right of your wife, as soon as I am gone, proper settlements securing it to her offspring in the usual manner. You don't look, Mr. Vidal, as if you thought this condition *would* make an insuperable objection to your accepting my girl for your wife?" added the kind-hearted gentleman, cordially holding out his hand to his future son-in-law.

And his intended son-in-law grasped it with such a charming eagerness, and uttered such gracious

and graceful words on the additional happiness which such an arrangement would produce, that it was no wonder the squire bustled away to find his daughter, with a strong feeling at his heart that Mary was quite right in the choice she had made, and that a man must be a very dull-pated sort of fellow, indeed, who could be surprised at his daughter's falling in love with such a man as Vidal.

"Will you wait here, till I come back to tell you what my little girl says to it all?" said the squire, his bright dark eye emitting a merry twinkle, at the notion of its being possible for him to go away before his fate was decided.

Vidal rested one hand upon the table, as if he could hardly stand, from excess of emotion, and with the other he shaded his eyes, as he replied:—

"Stay! Wait! My dear, dear Mr. Clementson, have pity on me! Think what my condition must be while a doubt remains to torture me. You will not command me to go, will you?"

"Can you believe I should be such an unfeeling brute, Vidal?" returned the good squire, with a look of the truest sympathy with what he felt quite sure must be the condition of the poor young man.

"Trust me, my dear fellow," he added, as he left the room; "trust me, that I will get over the ground

as rapidly as I possibly can; and you shall know the result immediately."

Mr. Clementson found his daughter very quietly employed in copying some new waltzes, lent her by Lady Sarah Monkton. She was in her own little morning sitting-room up-stairs, having left that commonly occupied by the family after breakfast, because she fancied that Lucy and young Herbert might like to find themselves alone.

"This is just as I would have it, my darling," said her father, advancing his head to see if any other person was in the apartment. "I want to speak to you for five minutes, my Mary. Will you let me come in, my dear?"

With all the alacrity with which such a request deserved to be received, Mary sprang from her chair, and taking the hand of her father, installed him in a *bergère* at the pleasantest corner of her bright autumn fire, and seating herself in another chair, very near him, she said, "I will not only let you in, but I will condescend into the bargain to hear all you have got to say to me."

"That may be promising a great deal, Madam Dalbury," he replied. "I have had a visiter this morning, Mary. Do you know who has been sitting with me?"

“No, papa. I have heard of no arrivals. Who was it?” said she, carelessly.

“It was Mr. Vidal, Mary.” And as he said so, he looked at her rather fixedly.

Whether the heiress would have blushed at all at the sound of this name, if Miss Lucy Dalton had not held with her the conversation concerning him, which has been related, may be doubted; but most assuredly, she would not have blushed as she did now. Her father now looked at her with ineffable fondness, and taking one of her hands between both his, said, “Does my dear girl guess what he has been talking about?”

Mary spoke not a word.

“I suspect you do, dearest. But, at any rate, you shall not be kept in suspense. Mr. Vidal loves you, my dearest Mary. And if you think that you could love him in return, my child, I see no reason why I should not have a son to take care of me, as well as a daughter. I am sure the neighbourhood will be very much obliged to us, if we manage to keep him; for I never saw any person so universally beloved and admired. But how do you feel about him, Mary? You must love and admire him a little more than all the rest put together, or I don't think he will be quite contented.”

“ Lucy was right then ! ” said Mary, in a low voice, as if she were thinking aloud.

“ What Lucy has spoken to you about him ? ” said Mr. Clementson, smiling. “ Yes, Mary, Lucy was quite right : and I dare say she has not said at all more than was true. But now, as the gentleman is here to speak in his own person, you will be able, if you will be graciously pleased to listen to him, to judge more correctly of his feelings from what he says himself, than you could possibly do by any report of hers. He is not very far off, Mary. Will you consent to see him ? ”

“ Now, papa ! Sec him now ? Oh ! do not let me see him now ! Indeed, and indeed, I shall not know what to say to him ! ” she replied.

“ He will know so well what to say to you, my dear, that the right and proper answer will be sure to come into your head, Mary. But you have not even told *me* yet, whether you should like me to have Mr. Vidal for a son. Should you, Mary ? ”

There was but one person in the whole world that Mary Clementson had ever seen, whom she thought exactly suited to be her father's son, and this person was Richard Herbert; and her father's question did most assuredly bring him to her mind;

but the effect of this was very different from what perhaps it ought to have been.

That such a question should suggest the idea of one man, was certainly no good reason why she should immediately feel herself very strongly disposed to accept another, but this, however, was the effect of it. Mary remembered Lucy's words, expressive of her suspicion that Richard was dearer to the heiress, than the heiress was to him. She remembered, too, that Lucy had confessed with beautiful confusion her being aware of the young man's attachment to herself, and all these recollections together led Mary to believe that the very best thing she could do, was to promise to marry Mr. Vidal as soon as her papa thought proper that she should marry at all.

She certainly admired Mr. Vidal very much, herself; and she knew quite well that all the ladies and gentlemen in the neighbourhood, admired him very much too. But neither her own admiration, nor that of all the people in the world put together, would have been so important in her eyes as the love and liking of her own dear father for him. Again, her sweet face was covered with a rosy blush, and after the hesitation of a moment, she softly murmured—"Yes."

The squire rubbed his hands, and almost laughed aloud in his glee. "God for ever bless and preserve you, my sweet child," said he; "how much better do I love such an answer as that, than the paltry miss-like reply, 'I don't know, papa.' But you look fluttered, my dear girl. Take my advice, Mary, here, take your bonnet and shawl, and steal out quietly into the flower-garden. Go out through the cloisters, dear, and nobody will see you. But I must go back to poor Vidal. I left him trembling from head to feet like an aspen leaf. It is barbarous to leave him in doubt any longer. I will just venture to tell him, that he need not hang himself. I suppose I may say as much as that, mayn't I?"

Mary smiled, not very gaily, perhaps, but it contented her father perfectly, and without another word being said by either, they descended the stairs arm-in-arm. The squire then opened for her the door leading from the billiard-room to the cloisters, and having watched her till she had passed through that of the flower-garden, he turned round in a very happy mood of mind, and marched back to the library.

Mr. Vidal, perhaps, did not affect *quite* all the anxiety which his speaking countenance expressed,

as the squire entered the room. He probably did feel rather an eager wish to know whether he was to be the future master of Dalbury Park, or not. Mr. Clementson was not a man to keep any one in suspense, even had he wished to do so; for a child might have read what his frank and fearless countenance expressed, as easily as the most accomplished physiognomist.

“Well, sir,” he began, as he walked up the room, with his firm, quick, cheerful-sounding step; “well, sir, I really think you have no absolute cause for despair, though my daughter has not as yet uttered many words explanatory of the nature of her feelings towards you.”

“May I not see her, sir?” demanded Mr. Vidal, with passionate earnestness.

The squire smiled, and stroked his chin doubtfully, but not severely.

“Oh! for mercy’s sake let me see her!” reiterated the lover, who really was anxious to get through all the preliminaries at once. “For sweet mercy’s sake do not let me leave the house till I have learnt my fate from her own lips!”

“Why as to leaving the house, Mr. Vidal,” replied the squire, laughing, “it is only by doing so that you have any chance just at present of

obtaining an interview with the young lady. I doubt though if it will be quite fair to tell you where she is. She did not hear the message you sent without a good deal of agitation, I promise you, and I told her that the best thing she could do would be to refresh herself by the sweet air of the flower-garden."

"And where is that blessed flower-garden?" demanded Vidal, eagerly.

"The flower-garden is hard by, almost close to the house," replied the squire; and after a moment's meditation, he added, "Come along, Vidal! I'll show you how to get to it. It is the best thing I can do, I believe, though at the first moment, dear creature, it is likely enough she may wish us both at the bottom of the Red Sea. But there must be a few agitating moments for her at first, and the sooner they are over the better."

Mr. Clementson then led the way to the often-mentioned cloister, and taking the arm of his companion, walked with him to the end of it, from whence the little Gothic door of the flower-garden was visible amidst the clustering honey-suckles trained round it.

"There Vidal! That little door will open with a touch, and there you will find the precious child

who is the heir to all her father's lands. Who, though her face is fair—and I think so, as well as you, young man—has a heart as much transcending in value, either her face, or her fortune, as you bright sun transcends the twinkling value of a farthing candle. If you have a place in that heart, you are one of the happiest men that ever lived—and if you should ever cause it one painful throb—you would be the most accursed!”

Having said these last words in a burst of strong emotion, the poor father suddenly turned away and re-entered the house.

Did the fascinating Vidal feel one little pang of self-reproach as he thought of the mistress in the wood? No; not the very least in the world.

“D—d twaddle!” was the muttered answer, as he made his way to the garden door.

And, luckily, the painfully solemn feeling which had come over the cheerful spirit of the squire as he spoke, vanished as he re-entered the billiard-room, and happened to think how very pleasant it would be to see half-a-dozen grand-children chasing one another round it.

Never was a young lady more thoroughly startled or more honestly astonished by the approach of a lover than was Mary Clementson as she saw the

tall and graceful Vidal rapidly approaching her. Gladly, oh! very gladly, would she have escaped from him; for although she certainly did, as the reader already knows, admire him very much, and although she had no longer the least doubt in the world that he was exceedingly in love with her, and although, as far as she had any thing to do with it, she quite intended to marry him; yet, notwithstanding all this, it cannot be denied that she was at that particular moment indulging in a hearty flood of tears, because Mr. Vidal had not happened to fall in love with Lucy Dalton instead of falling in love with her, and because her cousin Richard had not happened to fall in love with her instead of Lucy Dalton.

She had determined, however, before Mr. Vidal thus burst upon her that this should be the very last time that she would suffer such foolish and such wicked thoughts to enter her head, and therefore, though she felt that the fact of her having been shedding tears could not possibly be concealed, she quietly decided that the best way would be to remain standing at the little fountain beside which she had stationed herself when this foolish fit of melancholy musing seized upon her, as if she had fancied, poor child, that the little marble nymph

who presided over the miniature *jets d'eau* of the reservoir might receive her tears also as a tribute.

Mr. Vidal was too much accustomed to the study of ladies' eyes not to see, at the first glance, how the heiress of Dalbury had been engaged, but he knew perfectly well that Miranda was not the only pretty fool who wept for what she was glad of, and it was, therefore, with no diminution of courage, no sensation of doubt or dread of any kind that, dropping on one knee at her feet, he caught her hand, silently holding it between both his, for a moment, while he steadfastly gazed on her half-averted face, and then concluded "the passage" by fervently pressing his lips upon it.

When a lover has been sent to a young lady by her papa, with a mutual understanding between the father and daughter that he is to be accepted as a husband, he must of course be received with less coyness that might be excusable under any other circumstances . . . So Mary stood very still while her hand was kissed by the gentleman kneeling at her feet, it never occurring to her that she might withdraw it, or that it would be polite to request him to rise.

Mr. Vidal, however, was not only incapable of ever suffering from any awkwardness of his own,

but he generally knew, sufficiently well, how to rectify the awkwardness of others, to prevent his ever enduring any annoyance from either; and, thanks to his *habileté*, Mary's first love scene went off extremely well.

He showed, too, his quick appreciation of character by talking more of the unequalled liberality of mind evinced by her noble-minded father, than of the brightness of her eyes, or the beauty of her ruby lips and ivory teeth. In short, he managed to make this *al fresco* visit to her, exactly of the proper length, without leaving her at all more inclined to complain of her destiny than he had found her when it began, so that, when, at length, after an eloquently silent embrace from her father, she again found herself alone in her own boudoir, she was quite ready to confess that it would be a great deal better to be married to Mr. Vidal, than to live for ever harassed by Lucy's suspicions that she had fixed her affections on her cousin Richard.

This visit to the heiress of Dalbury was not, however, the first love scene in which Mr. Vidal had been engaged that morning. He had faithfully, and punctually, kept his appointment with Lucy at her mother's cottage; and as that respectable matron had as faithfully kept her promise of being

absent, the plans of the lovers for the future were discussed without interruption of any kind.

It is not necessary to give any further particulars respecting this interview, except that, at its conclusion, Mr. Vidal made his exit unseen by a back door, while Lucy, after carefully arranging the lock for her mother's return, according to her promise, walked out of the front door just in time to meet the family at the park as they assembled to breakfast, receiving as she passed along, on her homeward way, more than one expression of commendation from the right-judging neighbours, for the active filial affection which had brought her to her mother's cottage so early.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was a very sharp little fellow of about fourteen years of age, resident in the market-town of Compton, called Jerry Mills, with whom Mr. Theodore Vidal was lucky enough to make acquaintance about this time, and from whom he received many essential services. Jerry Mills had been once lucky enough to find a fossil in a quarry at some distance, which he brought, as all the little boys in the country did every odd-looking stone that they found, to Mr. Norman, who, to his inexpressible delight, found it to be one of a species exceedingly rare in that part of Great Britain.

This boy, upon whom, Mr. Norman being himself threatened with a fit of the gout, had devolved the delightful task of leading the steps of the enthusiastically-geological Vidal to various spots where fossil remains were to be hoped for, was now employed on

very liberal terms by Vidal himself, to make excursions in the neighbourhood, far and near, for the purpose of discovering objects of the kind, and whenever any such were discovered, a horse was immediately borrowed to convey Mr. Norman's guest to the spot, when five minutes sufficed to acquire all the information and all the success which, without such an *avant courier* to help him, might have taken hours, days, and weeks.

It has been said that there is no royal road to mathematics, but to geology Vidal certainly found there was, and by the help of it he speedily became in the eyes of Mr. Norman so every way delightful a guest, that there was no danger whatever of his wearing out his welcome at Fairy Ring, till the time should come when another Fairy Ring would be the means of supplying him with an abode for life.

And thus the pleasure-winged weeks wore themselves away, almost without any anxiety to dim their brightness; for although there were unquestionably some features of rather a quicksand character in the position of my hero, there was so much watchfulness, and so much skill on the alert, to save him from disaster, that his genius, fitted as it seemed by nature for petty intrigue, had only exercise enough to keep it in healthful activity.

Mr. Clementson insisted upon it that the marriage should not take place till after the first drawing-room, at which there were to be presentations, the following spring.

“ Mr. Vidal may have the pleasure of seeing her presented as his bride afterwards,” said the fond father. “ But I must once in my life have the delight of seeing my darling presented to her sovereign by the name of her ancestors.”

There was no mere affectation of regret in the disturbed look with which Mr. Vidal received this announcement. He would gladly have preferred to have pushed on the marriage as rapidly as possible; not so much from fearing that any want of skill on his part, or on that of Lucy either, should cause the discovery of what might have led to a postponement of his wedded happiness, to a more distant day than the next drawing-room. But the effect of his frequent and familiar visits to Dalbury, had been exactly the reverse of that produced on the mind of Richard Herbert by a similar intimacy; for whereas the young sailor had shrunk from the idea of being only suspected of admiring the heiress of so much wealth, Mr. Vidal's impatience to possess her increased with every allusion to the family possessions, and almost with every dinner that he ate at the family mansion.

To resist this mandate, however, was impossible, and he therefore not only submitted, but submitted with such a charming mixture of patience and impatience, of increased obedience to the father's will, and of tender tyranny in not enduring his Mary to converse or even look at any one but him, that Mr. Clementson himself was almost ready to confess that not even Mary could reasonably have hoped to find so passionately devoted a lover, in a man who had run such great danger of being spoiled by the admiration of the world. In short, every thing went on smoothly with my hero, and he felt now as he had done a hundred times before, that his lucky star could turn even danger into increased security for him.

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But this perfection of good fortune did not extend to Mr. Clementson. A circumstance occurred soon after the engagement of Mary and Mr. Vidal had been formally announced to the family, which went far towards destroying all his enjoyment.

It was not on the day immediately following this public announcement, but it was on the day after, that Richard Herbert knocked at the library-door, when he happened to know that the squire

was there alone, and begged permission to speak to him.

“Permission, Dick?” replied Mr. Clementson, with a good-humoured smile, and feeling quite certain that the young man was going to open his heart to him about Lucy. “Permission?—oh, yes, my dear fellow, you shall have permission, and whatever you ask me to do for you, that I will venture to promise I will do, let it be what it may.”

“You are very kind, sir,” replied poor Richard, with a melancholy smile. “Very kind, as you always are, and always have been to me. But all I want to say now is that, if you please, I must leave you; I find that I cannot stay any longer just now, at Dalbury.”

“Not stay any longer at Dalbury? Why what the deuce is the meaning of this, my dear boy? Has Lucy Dalton refused you?”

Richard’s handsome face became crimson. “I have never made any offer to Lucy Dalton, sir, which either by its refusal or acceptance could influence my movements.”

“The deuce you haven’t? But there is some lover-like quibble in what you are saying, I presume. I

won't pretend to say, my dear boy, that I was particularly well pleased by your making such a choice, but I soon made up my mind neither to fret about it nor oppose it, so you may reckon upon me as your friend, notwithstanding."

"Indeed, sir, I am very sorry!" said Richard, with a look of most unfeigned contrition.

"Very sorry for what, Dick? Why cannot you tell me straightforward what it is you mean? I always fancied that you were a particularly honest, candid sort of fellow. But now you appear to be full of mystery. What is it you are sorry for?" demanded the squire.

"I am sorry, sir, very sorry that my conduct should have led you or any one else to suppose that I wished to marry Miss Lucy Dalton. For no such wish ever entered my heart."

"Then I am very sorry too, Richard. But upon my word I cannot undertake to scold you about it. Sailor lads are a little too apt, they say, to make love in every port they come to. But I don't suppose that things have gone so far as to make it necessary you should run away from almost the only relations you have in the world. Has there been any explanation between you and the young woman?"

“ Oh, dear no, sir,” replied Richard. “ I do not believe it possible that she ever could seriously think I cared more about her than every sailor lad, as you say (and again poor Richard produced a melancholy smile) always does about all the pretty lasses he dances with. But I am very sorry that you, sir, should have thought I went too far.”

“ Nay, my dear boy,” returned Mr. Clementson, laughing, “ I don’t think any thing so unlikely would ever have come into my head, if it had not been put there. But I am afraid the girl herself fancied it, for your cousin Mary has told me as much. Lucy confessed it to her.”

The crimson blood again rushed to the brow of Richard. “ I have never,—” he said.

But there he stopped.

“ If I have been wrong, I am sorry; and I can say no more,” he added, after the interval of a moment. “ And now let me thank you, sir, for all your kindness to me. I wish my cousin—have the kindness to tell her so, sir—I wish her every possible happiness. And now farewell! I have taken the liberty of desiring that my portmanteau should be sent to the station. I shall walk to it. God bless you, sir!”

And Richard hurried from the room, or at least

attempted to do so; but his exit was prevented by the strong grasp of the squire's arm. "What *does* all this mean, Richard?" said he, gravely and sedately. "I feel for you as for a relation whom I greatly value, and I have, to the best of my power, endeavoured to make you understand this. Nay, I will not deny, Herbert, that I have flattered myself this attachment was mutual between us, and that, notwithstanding the disparity of our ages, you loved me also. But in this it is evident I must have been mistaken. If there were any such attachment on your part, you could not talk of leaving me thus lightly. However, neither my affection nor my relationship give me any right to detain you near me, contrary to your inclination. So here is my hand, Richard, and I heartily wish you well."

Instead of accepting the offered hand, the unfortunate young man threw his arms upon the table, and buried his face within them.

Mr. Clementson, who had risen from his chair when he uttered the above farewell, stood opposite to him with a vexed and puzzled look, and after the interval of a minute said: "Perhaps, Richard, I had better leave you. It is not my wish to give you pain, nor did I mean to reproach you. I am disappointed, I will not deny it; but I dare say

the fault is rather mine than yours. God bless you, boy! I had no right to fancy a gay young fellow like you would feel any particular delight in the society of an old one like me. You must write to us, my boy. God bless you! Don't remember my petulance."

"Not love you, sir! You think I do not love you!" exclaimed Richard, starting up, and displaying his Greek beauty, sadly defaced by violent weeping. "Oh! do not go away from me with that persuasion; the idea of it would haunt me to my dying day!"

"What *am* I to think of you, Richard?" demanded the squire, who was really much vexed, but greatly touched also, at this unexpected burst of feeling.

"If there is any thing on your mind that can account for all this, you are very wrong, and very unkind, to keep it from me!"

"Unkind?" repeated Richard. "Yes, it is both unkind and ungrateful," he added, after a moment's meditation. "The worst that can happen to me *now* is, that you should treat me as a silly boy. You cannot suspect me *now* of any mean, false, treacherous baseness. Mr. Clementson, you shall know why I run from you thus. You will not scorn my folly, my total want of every thing

like manly self-control more heartily than I scorn it myself. Had Mary, had your daughter, Mr. Clementson, been as poor as myself, I would—I would have tried if love could have won her. You may guess, sir, the reluctance with which I speak words which must sound so like presumption to you. At this moment I have but one feeling left which is not painful, and that arises from your thinking—and from Mary's thinking too—that I was really in love with Lucy Dalton. That proves, sir, does it not, that I did not behave dishonourably in return for all your generous kindness and trusting hospitality? You will not think now that I have acted basely?"

The poor squire was so completely thunder-struck by this disclosure, and by the consciousness that it was all too late to profit by it, that he sat silently staring at the young man, in a manner that seemed well calculated to pay in kind the puzzled feeling from which he had himself been suffering.

"Baseness and treachery? Oh! no, boy, there has been no baseness and treachery," he said at last; "but a most confounded deal of— But there is no good to be got by talking about it." And the troubled squire bit his lips severely.

“ You are unhappy here, my poor dear Richard, then?” he presently added, while a tear started to his eye. “ That is not what I would have wished for your mother’s son. But God’s will be done, Richard! Our wills and wishes are but little worth, a bubble or a straw can overset them. I believe you are right, my dear fellow, about going. But we won’t make any more blunders about liking one another; that may be set right, at any rate. You must let me know where you are going, Richard, and you must write to me, and tell me, as if you were opening your heart to your poor mother, you know, whether this young sorrow is likely to pass off. Let us hope it may, Richard, for that is the only way for me to have you back again, and I shall not feel very long contented without you.”

If any thing could have healed the smarting heart of poor Richard, it would have been listening to such language as this. His love for Mary, though a mere vehement and troublesome sensation, was not a whit more sincere than his love for her kind-spirited father, and to part with him thus was decidedly the greatest consolation of which his situation was susceptible.

They both agreed that it would be better for him

not to take leave of his cousin, as having hitherto kept his secret so well, it would be but folly were he to betray it now.

Lucy, however, Herbert determined that he would see. He perfectly well remembered all that had ever passed between them, and well knew that all his efforts to fall in love with her had never succeeded sufficiently to justify her fancying that he had any thing more serious in view than the obtaining her as his partner in a waltz.

Something to this effect he said to Mr. Clementson, who approved greatly of his taking a personal leave of the fair *parvenue*, and who promised, with a sigh which he could not quite conceal, to make Mary understand that his departure had been too sudden to prevent his waiting to see her after her return from the ride which she was taking in company with Mrs. Morris and Mr. Vidal.

Lucy was easily found, for they had seen her go into the flower-garden, and thither Richard followed her, determined to make the leave-taking ceremony as short as possible; for, to say truth, the fair creature had somewhat lost ground in his favour, by the too evident efforts which she had of late made to gain it.

When Richard entered the garden, he imme-

diately perceived that Lucy, whose back was towards him, was busily engaged in reading a letter.

This letter, by the way, was a very curious document, being an epistle from Mr. Vidal to his fair friend, strongly advising her to waste no more time in bringing about her intended marriage with the young lieutenant.

“It would be a most pernicious act of folly,” it said, “were you, dearest, to postpone this *too long*, merely to avoid the *disagreement* of marrying a boy, who must, I should imagine, be too completely indifferent to you, either in the way of liking or disliking, for it to signify three straws whether you marry him or not. Oblige me, therefore, by bringing the affair to as speedy a conclusion as possible. I conquered my averseness to it for your sake, you must now do the same for mine.”

This cool style of now treating the marriage of the woman he professed to adore, with another man, though the subject had been so often previously discussed between them in a different manner, was not quite agreeable to Miss Lucy, and she was fuming under the irritation it had occasioned, when Richard appeared before her.

She would certainly have greatly preferred his absence at that moment, but she was too much aware of the importance of the advice her lover had

given her, to intend neglecting it, however distasteful it might appear when coming from him.

Had Lucy Dalton known a little more of the world from its living pages, and a little less of it from those of French romance, she might not have felt so very certain as she did, that Richard Herbert only waited (with the timidity of youthful passion) to be sure that he should not be refused, in order to throw himself, and all that he possessed, or ever should possess, at her feet.

And at her feet she was now quite determined they should be laid, and that immediately.

This unexpected *tête-à-tête* was too favourable an opportunity to be lost, and, suddenly banishing the frown that had taken possession of her features, she turned to the young man a face that would have been radiant with smiles, had it not been melting with tenderness; but the union of both together, was so bewitching, that Richard could not have failed to think it lovely, if he had but seen it.

But he saw it not. Positively and literally he saw it not. He looked at Lucy, but there was no speculation in his eyes. He remembered that he was there to bid her farewell, and he remembered also, that Mr. Clementson, whose idea at that moment occupied him almost as much as that of his

daughter, particularly approved of his so doing, and he was resolved to do it accordingly.

“Miss Dalton,” he began.

But Lucy, seeing that he looked exceedingly unlike himself, conceived that he was overpowered by agitation and diffidence.

“Let us sit down together, dear friend,” she said, laying her hand endearingly upon his arm, and gently drawing him towards a covered seat not yet stripped of its autumn shelter of clematis; “let us sit here, dear Richard. Here, at least we can speak to each other unwatched. You must not think me unfeeling, Herbert; you must not think me insensible to the flattering attachment which I know you feel for me; you must not think this because I have never yet given you an opportunity of speaking to me. Ah, Richard! you cannot be insensible to the difficulties of my situation, and I think it will give you pleasure to hear that your friendship—nay, why should I speak thus coldly?—that your love, dearest Richard, has afforded me the greatest consolation that my dependant state has ever known.”

Inexpressibly shocked, and now, at least, feeling as much terrified by the scene he had to go through, as the young lady had supposed him to be before she had thus gently encouraged him, the unfortu-

nate Herbert remained silent, from utter inability to pronounce any single word that it would suit his purpose to say.

To a youth whose own heart has been wrung by the bitter pang of hopeless love, the sight of the same suffering in another, and that, too, occasioned by himself, is one that cannot be contemplated with indifference.

So very frank a pleading guilty to a "soft impeachment" before it was laid against her, was very likely to have produced in Richard's case the same sort of anti-pathetic feeling which it would probably have done in most others. But his very heart and soul had been so shaken by the preceding interview with Mr. Clementson that his judgment seemed disturbed, and though quite sure at the very bottom of his heart that he never had for a moment even hinted at the possibility of any serious love between them, he deeply, deeply reproached himself for having even playfully and unwittingly beguiled her innocent simplicity into a contrary belief.

He literally wrung his hands together, and lifted his beautiful eyes to heaven in a paroxysm of despair.

Merciful, sweet Heaven! His love to be her greatest consolation! His, whose whole soul was

so completely devoted to another, that it would have been the very blackest treason had he suffered any woman living to believe it were more possible he should fall in love with her than with his own grandmother.

“Lucy Dalton! my dear Miss Lucy Dalton! What can I say to you? There has been a sad, sad mistake, Miss Dalton. If it has been my fault, and of course it must have been, I beg you ten thousand pardons. What can I say to you?”

These words were uttered by poor Richard with such genuine agony of feeling, that his being most dreadfully unhappy about something, was quite evident; but Lucy Dalton's deep persuasion of her own loveliness and power of fascination was such, that the possibility of her having blundered in supposing the youth enamoured of her, never entered her head.

That she had no very clear idea of what he did mean is very certain, but she had a vague notion that he must have been building hopes of pecuniary assistance upon the squire's generosity, in which he had probably just found himself disappointed. Another moment's meditation confirmed this idea. The young man turned his head away from her, and supported his aching forehead with his hand in such

a style as soon to convince her that his agonies proceeded from feeling that the only fortune he could offer, with his hand, was so dreadfully below what her charms, and her delicate habits of life demanded, that he had not courage to make it.

Quite certain that by a little well-timed display of disinterested feeling, she could heal all his sorrows, and settle the business she had to perform, equally to the satisfaction of both her adorers, she indulged in a pretty half smile, and then, following with her gentle eyes the averted face of her companion, she said,

“ I think I understand you, dear Richard ! Yes ! I am sure I do, though you are so timidly reluctant to speak out. You are asking me for those ten thousand pardons, Richard, because you fancy that I must have shared your hopes respecting what your cousin, Mr. Clementson, *ought* to do for you. But alas, dear Richard, I have long known him too well to have indulged myself with any such hopes and expectations, either in your case, or my own. Both he and his daughter are exactly alike in this respect. They would like for ever to have you and me about them, because we possess more brilliancy of talent to make their time pass pleasantly than they possess themselves. But as to any noble thoughts

about making either of us independent! Take my word for it, nothing of the sort ever did, or ever will enter their heads. Our marriage, dearest Herbert, must take place without waiting for that, or it will never take place at all."

At the desperately strong words "*our marriage*," the young man started violently, and seemed to be putting himself "in act to speak," when Lucy, tenderly, yet playfully put her hand upon his shoulder, and laying her head with all its flowing ringlets of flaxen silk upon it, said—

"How well I understand that little start! Nay, it was more than a start, dear Richard! It seemed as if a shadow of emotion, too delicious for words, ran through your frame! Methinks, I feel it still. Compose yourself, dear friend! And let us speak together as those should speak, who look forward to long future years of life in which they hope to be all in all to each other! Compose yourself, dearest Richard, and listen to me."

Richard Herbert started up, at the risk of seeing the beautiful head and all its flowing tresses fall at his feet, for want of the support of his extremely uncomfortable shoulder. But he was growing desperate, and certainly spoke with more anxiety for his own immediate escape, than with any con-

sideration for the feelings of the lady, for he said,

“ I have made no mistake about Mr. Clementson, Lucy Dalton, excepting that I never expected to find him so perfectly good and kind as he has been to me. But you, I am afraid, have made as great a mistake about him as you have done about me. You are a very handsome girl, Miss Lucy Dalton, and a very good dancer, and having been always very obliging and civil to me, I have endeavoured to be the same to you. But now that I perceive how very much you have mistaken me, I feel called upon to declare that I never had any thoughts of marriage in my head—which I really think you might have found out yourself, considering that I never said one single word that could have been taken as a hint of such a thing. But perhaps you have only been laughing at me, and if so, you must laugh on, for I have nothing more grave to say that may check your mirth, than that I wish you may be as happy as you are beautiful.”

These words were spoken after he had retired to the distance of about two steps, and however courageous he might have felt, it certainly did look very much as if he were putting himself beyond the danger of being seized upon, for his off leg was de-

cidedly in the act of making a retreating movement, as he concluded his harangue.

Greatly too much dismayed and astonished to speak, Miss Lucy Dalton not only suffered him to finish the above address without interruption, but saw him, when it was ended, suddenly turn round, bound across the intervening lawn to the door of the garden, pass through it almost with a spring, and then close it between himself and her, with a sort of resolute pull, that suggested the idea of his not particularly wishing that it should be opened again at present, without making any effort to stop him.

Who is not familiar with that grand, but atrocious line?—

“Hell has no fury like a woman scorn’d!”

Any one who had looked at Lucy Dalton as that door closed, must have recalled it. And, oh! what a string of epithets rose from her dark-tinted heart to her bright-tinted lips as she listened to its closing sound!

“Puppy! Upstart! Beggar! Blackguard! Idiot! Milksop! Brat!”

And then the lips closed—closed tightly and firmly, over her ivory teeth—and if she had then syllabled her thoughts, she would have said, “Is there nothing I can do to be avenged of him? Oh!

would he were asleep before me, and I with a poisoned dagger in my hand!"

And next came the tormenting thought of what account she should give of this concluding and conclusive interview to Vidal. Must she tell him that she had offered herself, and that the boy had refused her? Her eyes really rolled, as if a sudden fit of frenzy had seized upon her, and so impossible did she feel it to dwell for a moment upon the idea of telling him any thing approaching the truth, that she finally resolved to avoid it by declaring to her lover that the enamoured boy had left her in despair, having been threatened by Mr. Clementson with the entire loss of his countenance and support, if he did not at once give up all thoughts of her. And now we must turn our attention for a short time to Lucy Dalton's respectable mother.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE widow Dalton was by no means displeased at her daughter's application to her for the use of her humble dwelling, for the purpose of receiving the visits of the "gentleman" she was about to marry.

Though fond of her daughter, as a lone woman with no earthly thing to love besides, is likely to be, even though a termagant, Mrs. Dalton was still far more proud than fond of her.

Her husband had been a good coachman and an honest man, and as such had deserved and obtained a certain degree of consideration and respect, both from the gentleman he served, and the neighbours among whom he dwelt. But his vixen wife knew perfectly well that with him expired every atom of the Dalton claim to respect, from either.

Few people, of course, knew as well as herself

what a particularly worthless old woman she was; and nobody, save herself, was aware that somehow or other her pretty daughter Lucy was the greatest little liar that ever was born; which, together with her obstinacy, her slyness, her violent temper, and very remarkable want of affection, rendered her, even in her mother's eyes, rather less estimable, and less deserving of any very particularly lucky chance in the way of preferment, than the majority of other girls in the parish.

When, therefore, she saw her "*had in*" from the kitchen at the park, where her father often used to take her, first into the play-room, then into the school-room, then into the drawing-room, and, in short, made the household pet of the motherless heiress, her triumph over her neighbours was of a much more animated character than theirs under similar circumstances would have been over her.

They perhaps might have thought such a thing natural enough, whereas Mrs. Dalton knew that it was exceedingly unnatural. And when to this was added the glory of being told, not only by Lucy herself, but by many of the servants, that her laughter could play on the music, and sing, and speak the *parlez-vous* language better than the young lady herself, there was nothing, save perhaps the

idea of the squire's marrying her, which appeared too extravagant for her ambition.

As long as Miss Clementson continued to be shut up within the strict retirement of her father's houses and parks, the widow Dalton was fain to be contented with the same sort of life for her daughter; but her striking beauty, rapid growth, and womanly appearance, had long made her impatient for the time to arrive when the chances for "her Lucy's marrying a gentleman" should begin.

The first opening of this new campaign, when at length it did come, was more favourable for her ambitious hopes, than she had ever ventured to anticipate. The being installed at the park as *Miss Dalton*, and taken out as Miss Clementson's companion to visit the neighbouring families, was a something so greatly more glorious than any thing she had ever anticipated, that it sufficed her to live upon for some time, and made her feel herself of so much importance among her neighbours, that while the novelty lasted, she seemed to wish for nothing more than the power of talking of it, and of making her hearers stare by her wonderful stories.

But Lucy committed a great blunder in neglecting her, and one, perhaps, greater still, in leav-

ing her in ignorance of the handsome provision which Mr. Clementson had made for her, in consideration of her devoting her time to his daughter.

The mischief which this led to, was first brought into action by a rather gibing question from one of her neighbours, who, after listening till she was well nigh weary, to the widow's boastful descriptions of the gay doings in which her daughter had so large a share, remarked that it would be all very well if the girl got good wages, for that money would bide after youth was gone.

"Wages!" cried Mrs. Dalton, with infinite contempt, "I tell you she dresses like a queen; and that's not to be done, I trow, without money. But the squire would feel ashamed of himself, I can tell you that, if he was to think of mentioning such a word as wages to Miss Lucy Dalton. Wages, indeed!"

And this did very well by way of an answer to her neighbour, at the moment; but the notion of payment for her daughter's services, recurred to her frequently afterwards; and had Lucy, instead of yielding to her fears that her mother would expect a part of her wealth, told her the truth, it is more than probable that the vain old woman would

have been perfectly satisfied with the knowledge that the money came, and was spent in decorating her beautiful daughter.

But her disappointment and vexation at never hearing that she got any money at all, led to the scene which has been already described between the mother and daughter, and had it not ended by the intimation that "*the gentleman*" who had been so ardently wished for, had been actually found, and that the "beauty" was in the way to become a real lady, with a name and a home of her own, the old woman would most certainly have executed her threat, and visited the squire with a demand for *wages*.

The first moment of obtaining an object, long and eagerly wished for, is generally one of good-humour, and so it was on this occasion with the widow Dalton, or she might not have acceded so easily to the necessity of Lucy's concealing from her the name of her future son-in-law. As it was, however, she had done all she had been desired to do very peaceably, had brushed up the little mansion, set a fine bough-pot of fresh flowers upon the table, and taken herself off to spend her half-crown upon a splendid breakfast of ale, toast, and gin, at the Queen's Head.

But neither the half-crown, nor the happy con-

sciousness of her daughter's having a lover, could suffice to keep such a spirit long tranquil, and Lucy had not only to find more half-crowns, but a constant succession of very fatiguing arguments, to prove that her hopes of an honourable marriage would be utterly destroyed if she disclosed the name of "*the gentleman*."

At the cost of great pains, of many half-crowns, and, worse still, of regular daily intoxication on the part of widow Dalton, Lucy had now gone on for some weeks receiving constant early morning visits from her lover at the cottage; but had been so terrified by the half sober threats of her mother to find out for herself the secret which was still withheld, that she thought any risk of her repeating the name less dangerous than leaving her to execute them, and she accordingly, with innumerable injunctions to secrecy, informed her that the gentleman was Lieutenant Herbert, a near relation of the squire's, and that they only delayed acknowledging their engagement till Mr. Clementson had performed his promise of doing "something handsome" for him.

The notion of becoming by marriage related to the squire, filled up, entirely to the satisfaction of the widow, all the gaps which her persecuted daughter was compelled to leave in stating the ways

and means by which her future dignity was to be maintained; and the old woman was once more left in good-humour.

But as Lucy took her walk back to the park after this conversation, her meditations brought her to the conviction that whether she liked it not, the young sailor must be led to make an avowal of his passion, and an offer of his hand without delay. His appearance in the garden within a few hours afterwards, and precisely at the moment when she was reading Vidal's disagreeable, but most urgent letter on the subject, appeared to be the work of destiny, and the resolute manner in which, as we have seen, she then set about the business she had to perform, is a proof that she felt compelled to yield to it.

What followed has been already related, and the probable consequences of it formed a theme of meditation for the disappointed Lucy, which was not brought to a conclusion when the bell rang which announced the necessity of dressing for dinner.

When Mr. Vidal arrived in the evening, according to custom (when he did not dine with them), he immediately inquired for Mr. Herbert; and the answer of Mr. Clementson, "*he has left us,*" was more unexpected than agreeable. To ask any ex-

planation of this from Lucy then was impossible; the only whisper he could find an opportunity of exchanging arranged a meeting at the cottage on the morrow. This meeting took place, and lasted so long that the ale and the toast, together with the gin, which always concluded the costly repast at the Queen's Head, had all been ordered, consumed, and paid for, before Mr. Vidal had made his exit at one door of the cottage, and Lucy at the other, according to the now very quietly established usage upon such occasions.

The cause of this imprudent delay was a quarrel between the lovers on the subject of Richard's departure, and a reconciliation afterwards, which took more time than the quarrel itself, and it was at the moment when this reconciliation was being sealed by a kiss that the widow Dalton suddenly appeared before them.

Had she happened to have approached her house, as usual, by the front door, this very disagreeable discovery scene would have been avoided, for Lucy never failed to secure that door on the inside, as long as their interview lasted, leaving the retreat by the back door (which opening upon a dirty little alley, seldom traversed, threatened no danger) always ready for the escape of Vidal in case of surprise.

But, for some reason or other, the widow Dalton now approached her own domain by this obscure sally-port, and the scene which followed was really tremendous.

Had Mrs. Dalton contented herself with her quart of ale and her toast, Lucy would have been spared a part of the humiliation which this first introduction of her parent to the elegant Mr. Vidal occasioned her, for in that case she would have only been tipsy in a trifling degree, and even that would probably have been rendered innoxious, by being accompanied with a degree of drowsiness that would have prevented her from making a noise. But the effects of the gin were very different. Her brain was too much accustomed to the dose to give way altogether under its influence, an effect, by the by, which would have been greatly less terrible to her daughter than her present condition, for had she fallen at the feet of the startled pair, as she entered, it might have passed for a fit of apoplexy, and all would have been well. But the scene which followed her entrance was altogether of a different description.

Her face flushed, her bonnet thrown off, and her dirty cap, with the grey hair under it, in the greatest disorder, she stopped short as she entered

the room, and fixing her wild-looking eyes upon Vidal, exclaimed, "And who the devil are you?"

Mortified and shocked beyond expression, Lucy rushed towards her, and used all the strength she had to push her back through the door by which she had entered; but the attempt was lamentably vain.

"Hoity-toity, hussy!" she screamed, shaking off the hands of her daughter, and seizing upon her shoulders with a powerful grasp, in her turn; "Hoity-toity, pretty Miss Lucy! Is this the way you treat your convenient mamma, when she comes in upon you a trifle too soon? But who is this chap, I say, hussy? Who are you, my fine fellow? or rather, what the devil do you do here—for now I look again, I know you well enough. Who are you, indeed, but the famous grand gentleman that is to marry Miss Clementson?—I know you well enough. Don't I go to Church as a decent Christian woman should do? and don't I see you there, my fine one, looking so meek and so mild as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. And, now then, I should just like to be told what business you have to come here kissing my daughter, when you are a going to marry Miss Mary? Tell me that, you villain!"

The whole of this speech was uttered with the greatest vehemence, her hands clenched, and her mouth literally foaming with rage.

“Go, Vidal, go!” murmured Lucy, one of whose arms was still firmly held by her powerful mother. “Go, I beseech you! She is mad, poor soul!—perfectly, perfectly mad!”

“Mad, am I, you infamous slut?” screamed the drunken woman, in a tone that seemed to justify Lucy’s assertion, “mad am I,” she repeated the minute after, but in a totally altered voice, and with a manner subdued by a strong effort into a sort of drunken imitation of dignified composure.

“I am not so mad, let me tell you, Miss Lucy Dalton, and let me tell you, too, Master elegant Vidal, but what I can speak a word or two to the purpose when I have a mind to do it; just for instance, sir, I am quite capable to walk up, as steady as a judge, to Dalbury Park, and to say to the squire, Mr. Clementson, sir, I am come to tell you a piece of news that it is fitting as you should know. My beautiful daughter, Miss Lucy Dalton, sir, is the real object of Mr. Vidal’s tender love, as I have good reason and right to say, for I have seen their kisses; and your little daughter, Miss Mary, sir, is only to be taken by the gentleman for the

sake of her wealth—so don't say, sir—and then I will make him an elegant courtesy, just so ; don't say, sir, as I have acted in any way dishonourable, for I have given you fair notice. That's what I'll say, my dear darlings, and then we will see what will come of it."

"Is she capable of doing such a thing?" demanded Vidal, fixing his long eyes upon Lucy with a glance that had very little love in it.

"Most certainly she is," returned the beauty, raising to her forehead the hand not grasped in that of her mother, and looking back at him in a manner that spoke eloquently enough both reproach and despair.

For a moment there was not another word spoken by either. The old woman stood gazing on the discomfited pair with a sort of drunken fun in her eye, that it was horrible to behold.

"I think I know who is the master now," she said, at length, giving a nod, first to one, then to the other: "Half-a-crown, Miss Lucy? Don't you think I shall charge rather more than half-a-crown now? By the living jingo, I will drink both your healths, and it is not one glass shall content me."

"Give her money," said Lucy, addressing Vidal in French. "It is very horrible, and so is all the

rest that must follow from it," she continued, in the same language, while a diabolical idea crossed her mind. "Give her money. I have none with me. Give her a few shillings and she will be in no state to do the mischief she threatens."

At the first words Lucy thus uttered, the drunken woman stared at her as if she were trying to comprehend what she said, but then perceiving that she was speaking another language, and instantly surmising that her motive for doing so was to keep her in ignorance of what she was saying, she burst into a frightful fit of rage, and clenching her large fists she approached them to the pale face of her daughter in a way that compelled Vidal to step forward and divide them.

"What! Do you think you can keep her from me, you puppy?" cried the virago, giving him a tolerably powerful box on the ear. "Take that, just to give you a notion of what the beauty's mother is up to when she is in earnest, and now be off. I know I am not so clear in the head as I ought to be when I have got business to do; but it will go off when I have lain down for a bit. Business there is to be done, and that business I'll do if you was twice as tall, Mr. Vidal, and twice as fine into the bargain. Yes, sir, I'll do the business; but

there may be more ways than one of doing it, and that will be settled according as you behave yourself. Come to this house to-morrow morning at the same time that you have been used to meet *her* here; for you are the man, I take it, and no other, for whom I have been turned out so terrible often of late. You come here to-morrow, sir, as you know the way so well, and then we will talk over what I will, and what I won't do."

Vidal looked at Lucy, as if to ask her whether this mandate was to be obeyed. She understood the appeal, and replied to it by pronouncing the single word, "Come."

He then darted from the room by the same obscure mode of exit he had so often used before, and the mother and daughter were left alone.

It was not often that the spirit of Lucy Dalton sank subdued within her. But it did so now. She dropped into a chair, and said in a voice that had nothing of combativeness in it, "You had better lie down on the bed, mother."

"Perhaps I had, Lucy, for I feel as if I had been running through a fire, and got scorched. But I am not drunk, girl, I am not drunk *now*, whatever I might have been when I first comed in. I have had enough to sober me."

She sighed or rather groaned bitterly, and seating herself in a chair beside the table that held the garish-looking flower-pot, pushed it away from her, and said. "So then! The very worst of shame is what I have been made to do honour to, by all the fine gay flowers I could beg, borrow, or steal! And this is the end of your grandeur, girl!"

"What do you mean by the end of it, mother? It won't be the end, if you won't make it so," replied Lucy.

"And how am I to make or mar such a job as you have been about?" returned her mother. "I might have looked for folly, and vanity, and disobedience at your hands, Lucy, but not such folly, vanity, and disobedience as this! Tell me, lost and wretched girl, tell me if this villain, whom we all know is engaged to be married to Miss Mary, is the *gentleman* you have been talking to me about? Is this the man you said was going to marry you?"

"No, mother, it is not. All that I told you was true about that other. But he has proved himself a false-hearted villain, and has taken himself off for good."

"Why Lucy!" said the worthless woman, looking really shocked, "I have never pretended to be better than my neighbours—but never in my very

wildest of days, years before you were ever born, or thought of, no, never did I dream of such horrid double-faced tricks as you have been playing now! Not content with playing the fool, as there is no reason to doubt you have done, with the gentleman you expected would marry you—if you haven't been tampering with the engaged husband of your young lady! And *she* has never been proud to you in any way, whatever you may think the squire and the governesses may have been. Isn't this a good bit too bad, Lucy? And what do you think is to come of it, at last?"

"If you would not be in such a confounded hurry to find fault with me, mother," replied Lucy, her spirit reviving as her active brain already began to plot and plan an escape from her difficulties, "I could show you plainly enough that I have been neither so wicked, nor so foolish as you seem to imagine, and if you will but play the cards that I shall put into your hands as you ought to do, you will find that every thing will turn out well at last. Are you sober enough, mother, to understand what I have got to say to you?"

"Sober? Faith, you have contrived to manage that, miss, at any rate. But stay a minute. I think you have addled my brain with your tricks.

Let me dip my head in a bucket of water, and I shall be as fit to listen to your rigmarole, you bad one, as if I was a judge upon the bench."

The widow Dalton having retired to a little shed at the back of the mansion, and duly performed the proposed ablution, returned to her daughter, who appeared to be in profound meditation, with certainly a much greater appearance of being in the possession of her reason, than at her last entrance.

"Now then, girl!" she said, "and if I don't listen to you with patience, don't comfort yourself with thinking that it is because I am drunk. Gin isn't so bad as treachery, after all."

"There has been no treachery in the case, mother," replied Lucy, assuming the look and tone of injured innocence. "But if you set off with your head crammed full of prejudice against me, there is no use in my opening my heart to you—for I dare say you won't believe a word I say."

"And why, girl, did you never open your heart to me before?" returned Mrs. Dalton. "Why did you go on trying to make me believe one thing, while it is as clear as light that it is another that has happened? Is that the way to make me believe you, even if you do speak truth at last?"

“ I would have told you all, mother, and I longed to do it—only I had been made to promise I would keep my secret to myself—but if you will listen to me now, you shall hear the whole truth, and it may be, mother, that you may get me out of the scrape I have unfortunately got into. Will you listen to me?”

“ On with you, girl!” said the widow, with a sort of grunt which showed she anticipated but little pleasure from the promised communication. “ I don’t see that I have got any thing else to do, but just to listen to whatever you are pleased to tell me.”

“ Then you shall hear the whole truth,” replied Lucy; “ I need not tell you all about the ball, and my being dressed out as fine as Miss Mary herself, for you know all that already; but what you do not know, is that the gentleman you have just seen here, was reckoned by every body the grandest and handsomest gentleman there, and Miss Mary that very night fell in love with him, while, unluckily, he fell in love with me.”

The widow groaned.

“ Well, mother, it was no fault of mine,” continued Lucy, “ though it is I who will be punished for it, if you don’t help me. But pray don’t inter-

rupt me any more with your groans, or I shall never get to the end of my story. Neither was Mr. Vidal the only gentleman who fell in love with me. Lieutenant Herbert, the squire's cousin, that you must have seen a hundred times about the village, was as much taken with me as Mr. Vidal, and a handsome young man he was; and his being so nearly related to the family, made me think the more of him, for I won't say but it would have gratified my pride to hear our proud squire call me cousin. Things were ordered differently, however. That gentleman, that Mr. Vidal, mother, that you have just seen, is one of those men that no woman's heart can stand against. And when he told me that he loved me, I cared no more for the squire's cousin, than if he had been one of the stable-boys. And by degrees, mother, Mr. Vidal got the better of me. I don't mean to deny it, but it will be your fault if any body else knows it except our three selves. And now, mother, you must please to observe, before you accuse me any more of treachery, that Mr. Vidal was my lover long before any body found out that Miss Mary wanted to have him for a husband. He has got a pretty little fortune, though he is not what such a great land-holder as our squire would call

rich; and as he always promised to marry me as soon as he got some business settled, which could be done more conveniently while he was single than after he was married, I was quite satisfied, for I perfectly doated upon him, and certainly was not so civil as I might have been to the young lieutenant. And this was the way things were with us, when the squire found out that Miss Mary was dying for love of Mr. Vidal, and you know well enough of old, that he never denies her any thing. So the old gentleman makes the young one quickly understand that if he would like to have his daughter and his fine estate, he had nothing to do but to say so. And then, mother, my elegant lover showed that he thought more of money than of love. And yet he understood enough of what true love was, to trust to my generosity, even when he was binding himself to another; and for his sake I consented to give up all hope of being his wife, and to make up my mind to marry the lieutenant; but I suppose I had made him too bitterly angry by not having been always quite as ready to listen to him as I might have been, for lo and behold! my young gentleman turned restive and took himself off. And this, mother,

as you can plainly see, is the worst part of the business. What is to become of me now?"

"Become of you, you bad hussy?" replied her mother; "what can become of you but ruin and disgrace everlasting? And this is the end of all my grand boasting about you! Oh! thou vile girl! I shall never be able to hold up my head again, as long as I live!"

And here the widow Dalton wept, or seemed to weep with considerable violence.

"Now don't begin that way, mother!" resumed Lucy; "no good can come of howling and crying; but all the mischief you fear, may be prevented, and I turn out just such a fine lady as you wanted me to be, if you will only be reasonable, and do as I would have you."

Mrs Dalton upon this ceased her noisy lamentation, and again prepared herself to listen, though with no very amiable expression of countenance.

"Of course, I spoke my mind freely to Mr. Vidal, when I found that I had no chance of concealing my misfortune by marrying the young officer. He had been quite as much bent upon this scheme as I was, and seemed greatly cut up

by its failure. But what was it to him, in comparison to the utter destruction it was to me? And as he had sworn to me ten thousand times over that though his deficiency in point of fortune made it very desirable he should make this great match, yet still that he adored me as passionately as ever, I ventured to tell him plainly that if, indeed, he loved me, he would prove it now by giving up every thing, and save me from madness and misery, by marrying me."

"And what was the villain's answer?" demanded Mrs. Dalton, fiercely.

"Why it was not quite satisfactory, mother, and yet it was not altogether unkind. He really did seem quite as fond of me as ever, but said he could not promise to give up Miss Mary. Not for any love or liking he had for her, nor yet for the sake of her money, which he could make up his mind to give up, perhaps, for my sake; but what he feared worst of all, was the disgrace of breaking his engagement with her."

"Disgrace, the villain! And it is we, then, who are to bear the disgrace instead of him? No doubt of it; and what could you expect better, fool that you are?" exclaimed the widow.

"I will tell you what I expect better, mother,"

said Lucy, quietly; "I expect to marry Mr. Vidal myself, and then whatever disgrace there is, we shall at any rate divide it between us. Nor do I see any occasion for disgrace at all. But it is you, mother, who must manage this."

"Is the girl mad?" exclaimed the angry parent; "what power have I to make him marry you, fool that you are? You have given up all power over him!"

"Not all, perhaps, but a good deal, mother, I dare say. However, it is your power over him, and not mine, that I am talking about now," resumed Lucy, with one of her own beautiful smiles.

"You have discovered how matters stood between us by accident. Had I told you, I believe he never would have forgiven me. But it was his fault, for staying too long, not mine, in any way; so that your knowing every thing, and acting accordingly, will make no ill blood between us."

"Acting accordingly? What do you call acting accordingly? Tearing him piecemeal, limb from limb; that is what I should call acting accordingly," replied her mother, from between her closed teeth.

"No, mother, that is not it," returned Lucy, speaking with great composure, and appearing to have wonderfully recovered her equanimity. "I

have no wish whatever to see you tear Mr. Vidal limb from limb, nor do I think you would mend my condition, or your own either, by doing so. But if your wish is to punish him, without being particular about tearing him to pieces, I think I could propose something that would answer your purpose. His principal terror and suffering at this moment arises from dread of exposure. I really don't think that, comparatively speaking, he would care at all for losing the hand of the heiress, but he won't consent to it either, unless he is driven to it. Now the way to drive him is this. When he comes here to-morrow morning, it will be quite right and proper that you should appear to be quite in as great a rage as you did to-day. Only, take care to be sober enough to know what you say. I'll give you money to get a comfortable breakfast at the Queen's Head afterwards. And after you have relieved your mind a little by abusing him, I would have you tell him that you insist upon his marrying me. Perhaps he may say he will, or perhaps he may say he won't, but in either case you must have a formal promise of marriage drawn up, which you must set before him, and tell him, that unless he puts his name to it immediately, you will, before mid-day, go up to the park, and disclose the whole affair to the

squire, and then I fancy you will find that he will sign it."

"Egad!" exclaimed the old woman, with a savage smile, "if I thought I could manage that, I would forgive thee, girl, for all that is gone and past, as freely as I ever forgave thee the stealing an apple."

"You just say what I have told you, mother, and only keep steady to it, and trust my word for it, every thing will end as you wish," said Lucy.

"Then give me a kiss, girl, and take yourself off. I'll not put you out in your plot by any clumsiness of mine," replied her mother.

The kiss was very cordially given and returned, and a lurking half sovereign discovered in Lucy's purse, which she presented to her well-pleased parent, with these words: "Look here, mother, this is enough to pay for three bottles of gin, isn't it? And if you will take my advice, you will spend it that way directly. It will be a great deal cheaper, you know, than taking every drop you get at the Queen's Head, besides which, it will be much more comfortable, as well as much more respectable, to have it in the house, instead of your being obliged to run for it to the public-house for everlasting."

Mrs. Dalton extended her large hand and took

the money, turning it over and over in her palm with the other hand, as if to be sure of its being really the precious thing it seemed to be, and then, looking steadily in her daughter's face, she said,

“Now then, Lucy Dalton, I do believe that you think you have still a chance of marrying a gentleman. You never had such a kind thought as this before, Lucy! You are quite right about its being cheaper bought this way, and I shall lay the money out directly, according to your dutiful intention. I wish I was strong enough in health to do without it. But I am not, my dear child, the worse luck's mine. Thank ye, Lucy; thank ye, dear. It is acting like a child by me, having such a kind thought as that.”

Lucy coloured slightly as her mother thus addressed her, and rather hastily wishing her good morning, left the cottage.

CHAPTER XV.

LUCY DALTON returned to the park with a rapid step. Her brain was busy with many thoughts, and she had much business to get through before the sun went down. The first thing she had to do was to get sight of Vidal for a moment. A moment would suffice, for she had not much above a dozen words to say to him, but those were important.

She knew that he was engaged to ride with Mary after luncheon, and also that he had promised to come in time to join the family at that meal; she therefore feared not that she should find any difficulty in effecting her purpose, nor did she.

When Mary went up-stairs to invest herself in her riding habit and hat, Lucy took a bunch of grapes from the table, and walking round to where Vidal stood looking out of the window into the

park, she appeared pointing out to him the peculiar beauty and size of the fruit, while she said,

“Meet me, when every body else shall be gone to dress for to-night’s dance, at the old place in the wood. More than life depends upon it. Your dressing things, of course, will be here as usual, and, if time fails, we can both plead a late walk, and dress after dinner.”

He scarcely nodded his head in reply, but his eye told her that he would come.

And come he did, and grievously grave was the talk which now took place under the shelter of the nearly leafless oaks, which a few short weeks before had bowed their proud branches over the murmured rhapsodies of the pair.

When, however, they first met on the present occasion, Mr. Vidal seemed to think his part in the scene which he was invited to perform, was to make love to the fair Lucy as passionately as ever; but she very speedily convinced him that he was mistaken. For upon his gaily saying, “It was an unlucky hit, dearest, was it not, the old lady’s popping in upon us yesterday so unexpectedly?” she answered slowly, and with a movement of her hand which seemed intended to wave away all thoughts of jesting,

“Vidal! you know not the spirit you have roused! That woman! my mother! if indeed she be my mother, which many people have doubted, is a demon, a monster, whose passions once awakened sleep not, rest not, pause not, till they have been soothed by the destruction of the unfortunate who has offended her, let that person be her own child, or an entire stranger.”

“What do you mean, Lucy?” returned Mr. Vidal, looking a good deal annoyed. “Do you mean that the old woman intends to murder me?”

“She might not scruple it,” replied Lucy, “if the doing so would fully satisfy her vengeance. But it would not suffice. Did she see you breathless at her feet, Vidal, she would curse the stillness that might seem to indicate that you could suffer no more.”

Vidal shuddered.

“Gracious Heaven! my dear love!” he exclaimed, “what a horrible being you describe! I hope there is a little poetical exaggeration in the portrait, and that we shall contrive to pacify her by some means less disagreeable than submitting ourselves to be murdered by lingering torments.”

“This light tone, Mr. Vidal,” said Lucy, very solemnly, “but ill accords, I promise you, with the

position in which you stand at this moment. You have often dilated to me, and I have been charmed; I listened to you, on your power of making those around you bend (all smiling and well pleased while) to your wishes, and your will. But if I mistake not, you are about to see a character enter upon the scene with you, who will snatch the charming rod out of your hand, and destroy all our enchantments. You have never before encountered such a character as my mother, Vidal."

"What is it you mean, Lucy? What would you have me do? Have you any scheme to propose, by which I may hope to escape some of the horrors with which you threaten me?" said Vidal, half alarmed, yet at the same time more than half offended by finding something mysterious in her manner, which he could not understand.

"By what she said this morning when she issued her commands in so peremptory a manner for my return to-morrow, I thought she meant that the affair might be settled by my giving her money, and that I intend to do. And I don't see what her threatened vengeance can obtain, that can be worth the loss of that. As to her threat of going to the park, and saying that she saw me kiss you, it is impossible you can suppose I should care for that.

Even if she did so, it could only be treated as a joke by such a man as Mr. Clementson; but I cannot believe that she would be so mad as to risk the loss, or rather to *insure* the loss of your situation with Miss Clementson, for the sake of telling such a silly story of me."

Oh! how the heart of Lucy Dalton swelled and throbbed as she listened to this speech!

"*Her situation with Miss Clementson!*"

"Treated as a joke!"

"A silly story!"

It was all, all wormwood. Yet it seemed to do her good, too; for she had conceived a project which, though horrible enough to make her tremble as she thought of it, would, if successful, place Vidal sufficiently in her power to afford her an opportunity of proving to him that the affair between them was no joke; and could she at that moment have made him feel that it was a tragedy, it would have been a comfort to her.

Her purpose and her nerves braced by this consideration, she had sufficient power over herself to conceal from him completely the galling effect which his words had produced on her; and assuming the tone and manner of devoted affection and watchful tenderness, she replied:

“Treat not so lightly, my dearest Vidal, a danger which threatens the destruction of all the bright prospects that now seem opening before you. The property of Mr. Clementson is, as I have good reason to believe, considerably larger than he has stated it to you. Do not, for Heaven’s sake, risk the possession of this by any thoughtless want of caution! My mother has a spirit as firm and as masculine as her person; and however welcome money might be to her, believe me, my dearest friend, believe me, who know her well, that no sum of money which you can have the power to offer her, would be accepted by her in the place of her revenge. She believes that you have destroyed all my hopes of an honourable establishment in life, and she has firmly fixed her very heart and soul upon breaking off your marriage with Mary Clementson in return. And this she will do, Vidal, as surely as she lives, unless sudden means, sudden and strong, Vidal! are taken to prevent it.”

“And what are those means to be?” he replied, with gravity enough to convince Lucy that she had at least succeeded in alarming him; “Money I am willing to give; but I really know of nothing else I can do.”

“But she will tell you, Vidal,” replied Lucy.

“ I remained with her for more than an hour this morning after you went, and then, after bathing her head in cold water, she became perfectly calm, and told me what it was her purpose to do, with a quiet dogged sturdiness of manner, which convinced me—who know her only too well, Vidal!—that she will do it. The sort of deposition which she intends to lay before Mr. Clementson will be quite sufficient, *trust me*, to prevent your marriage with Mary. This marriage, indeed, she most solemnly swore never should take place; and she will keep her oath, if—”

“ If what !” exclaimed Vidal, the clear pale brown of his complexion becoming crimson ; “ do you mean to tell me that you expect she will succeed in preventing my marriage ?”

“ Yes, I do,” returned Lucy. “ I do not entertain the slightest doubt that she will succeed, if she is permitted to set about it.”

“ Speak out at once !” cried Vidal, passionately. “ Do you know of any means by which she can be prevented ?”

“ I think I do,” returned his companion, almost in a whisper; “ but—but you must first comply with the demand, which she told me it was her intention to make, of a written promise to marry

me. Nothing but your giving her this will prevent her disclosing all she knows to Mr. Clementson to-morrow morning."

Mr. Vidal cast a look upon Lucy which she did not see, but which spoke plainly enough his suspicion that this promise of marriage scheme might possibly have originated with her.

But her eyes were fixed upon the ground.

After the meditation of a moment, he said, in a manner that suggested no idea of such a suspicion, "But, my dear love, such a promise in her hands would prove as effectual a preventive to my marriage with the heiress, as any spoken statement she could make concerning us. And we have already discussed, dearest, the comparative advantages of having a rich lover, or a poor husband ; surely you have not forgotten all this ?"

"I have forgotten nothing," replied Lucy, gently (and truly), "I never can forget any thing wherein you are concerned, Vidal, and I am about to give you a tremendous proof of my devotion to you. If you give this written promise to my mother, it will be, in the first instance, remember, in her hands, and not in Mr. Clementson's; and before it can pass from the one to the other, both she, and it, must be taken care of."

“Taken care of?” repeated Vidal, in a voice of terror; “gracious Heaven, Lucy!—what do you mean?”

“Nothing quite so bad as you seem ready to give me credit for, my good friend,” she replied, “but something too bad to be excused by any thing less sacred—less devoted than my attachment to you.”

“No more enigmas, I beseech you, my dear girl, if you do not mean to drive me wild!” he exclaimed. “Remember, Lucy, that we have both got to appear at the dinner-table, and it will be impossible if we linger here much longer. Tell me at once, what is it you mean to propose to me?”

“This is what I mean to propose, my too dear, too deeply worshipped friend!” she solemnly replied.

“You must meet me at the dwelling of my mother to-morrow morning, and you must set your name to the paper which she will lay before you. This is all that it will be necessary for you to do. My task will be a more painful one. A very moderate quantity of ardent spirits throws her into the state in which you saw her yesterday. I have already taken care that she shall have enough, and more than enough, to produce this horrible effect ready at hand. When she has taken it, I must leave her, and little acting will be necessary on my part to per-

suade her neighbours that she is in a state of frenzy. I must state this to be the case to Mr. Clementson also, and as I shall immediately return to her, there will be no difficulty in supplying her with this favourite indulgence sufficiently to sustain the idea that she is mad. All she chances to utter of unknown truth, while she is in this condition, will only tend to confirm the idea. At the distance of three miles from Compton there is an asylum for lunatics, of which Mr. Clementson is one of the directors. He will cause her to be immediately admitted into it, and there, Vidal, she must remain till your marriage with Mary Clementson has been accomplished."

She ceased, and Vidal gazed at her for a moment, with a look expressive of mingled awe and admiration. "All this might be easily done, certainly, my dear love, and might answer the purpose well; but what would become of the promise of marriage, Lucy?"

She looked up at him with one of her own beautiful smiles, as she replied: "Are you fearful, Vidal, that I should make a treacherous use of it? It must be got from my mother by me; and fear not, dearest, that it shall be safely restored to you. But now you know all, and it is indeed high time

that we should hasten back. If you think my scheme worth trying, you will do your part towards it; if not, matters must take their course. You, Vidal, will lose the administration of the Dalbury rents, which we have both of us fancied you would manage so ably, and I shall lose my situation of friend and companion in ordinary to the heiress."

"Fear not, Lucy," he replied, "the scheme is a good scheme, and shall not be marred by any want either of skill or of confidence on my part."

They then shook hands affectionately and parted, returning to the house by different paths, and reaching it in time to avoid any danger of detection.

CHAPTER XVI.

THIS atrocious scheme having been thus ably arranged, no difficulty whatever occurred in the perpetration of it. Full well did Lucy know that the facility for repeated doses of the horrid poison which she had now afforded her wretched parent, would infallibly produce precisely the effect she wished upon her brain; for never had she seen her indulge in repeated drams without witnessing consequences which might well be mistaken for frenzy.

Mr. Vidal was punctual to his appointment at the cottage, and found the widow in a very different state from what she had been the day before. She might truly have said that she was "fasting from all but sin," for quite aware of her own infirmity, she determined to run no risk in the performance of the task which she, on her side, had undertaken, by losing her command over her reason.

She was, therefore, perfectly sober, and being moreover perfectly well dressed for her station, her general appearance and manners were so very unlike what would be necessary for the part allotted to her in the drama about to be performed, that Vidal was startled, and looked at Lucy, whom he found already there, with a glance which seemed to inquire if all were right.

To this glance she found an opportunity of answering in words, while her mother was for a moment absent from the room.

“Fear not,” she said. “Were the charm at work already, she would be in no condition to be kept from the park by the written promise, or by any thing else. As soon as you shall have done what she requires, I will take care to guard against any mischief that might arise to you in consequence. Surely, Theodore, you are not afraid to trust me?”

The old woman then re-entered the room with a written paper in one hand, and a pen and ink-bottle in the other.

“Now, young gentleman,” she said, “sign this, and you shall be forgiven by Heaven and by me too, for having spoiled better matches for my beautiful daughter than any that you can promise her.”

Vidal took the paper and read it. The document

was drawn up with great clearness and precision, for which, and not unjustly, he gave the lovely Lucy credit. He smiled, but it was a smile that nobody saw, and then he deliberately took the pen and signed it."

An expression of half-smothered triumph might have been seen lurking in Lucy's soft blue eye, had it been carefully looked for, but it was not.

Mrs. Dalton took up the paper and deposited it in her ample pocket, and Mr. Vidal sought his hat and gloves; but he paused yet a moment before he left his now affianced wife (being the third who had been honoured by standing in that position to him, since his arrival in the neighbourhood, nine weeks and three days before), and said: "Now, then, my dear Mrs. Dalton, I flatter myself that there is peace between us? May I claim the affectionate embrace that a mother bestows upon a son?"

Lucy was rather startled at the proposition, but a moment's thought made her cordially applaud it. Nothing could be more likely to put her mother in gay spirits—a state of mind in which she particularly wished to see her; and that the proposition was not an injudicious one was immediately proved by the cordiality with which it was accepted.

"You may claim it, and you shall have it, my

dear son," said the proud woman, looking at the elegant personage who demanded this favour with great satisfaction. "If you was my own son born, I could not give you a kiss with greater pleasure," and as she spoke she opened wide her large, long arms to receive him.

Vidal smilingly extended his arms also, and eagerly stepping forward they were mutually clasped together in the most loving style possible, and then still smilingly, and most gracefully, he kissed his hand to his promised bride and withdrew.

"Now then, mother," said Lucy, gaily, "now then, I do think you deserve to have the pleasure of drinking his health in whatever you like best. Did you do what I told you, yesterday?"

"Did I!" replied Mrs. Dalton. "Do you think I didn't?" and opening a small cupboard beside the fire, she displayed three black bottles standing in a row, and a small tumbler before them.

"That looks comfortable, mother, doesn't it?" said Lucy. "And I don't like that you should go any more to the public house. You shan't want a glass of what will be a comfort to you more by half at home than at the Queen's Head, where you would get stared at by all the vulgar fellows in the

place. You will enjoy it more here, won't you, mother?"

"There is no doubt of that, girl; but I must get my breakfast first. I shan't ask you to stay, Lucy, or you'll be missed. Give me a kiss as hearty as your sweetheart did, and go home," said Mrs. Dalton.

Lucy obeyed, and sat down to the elegantly spread breakfast-table at the park with such a soft, meek look of gentle loveliness as seemed to proclaim a spirit as tranquil as her cheek was fair.

How many a rude, rough, ill-assorted set of features form the figure-heads of some poor things that float unheeded through life, though freighted with a precious cargo of holy thoughts and pure affections!—while such a gay, fair-looking craft as Lucy, though laden from hold to top-mast with mischief, is cheered by a cordial hail when she heaves in sight, and taken in tow with most terrible indifference as to the consequences, by perhaps some of the noblest vessels in the world.

As soon as the breakfast was ended, Mary invited her precious companion to practise a duet with her, which Mrs. Morris was ready to superintend, and accompany. To which proposition Lucy replied,

"Excuse me this morning, dearest Mary! I

want to pass an hour with my poor mother. I saw her yesterday for a moment, and there was something in her manner which made me uneasy."

"In her manner? What do you mean, my dear girl?" said Mary, kindly.

"I hardly know myself, Mary," returned Lucy, shaking her head, and looking mysterious. "But a very shocking idea has occurred to me once or twice lately about her. I cannot help thinking, my dearest Miss Clementson, that her poor head is not right. How very dreadful it would be were she to lose her senses!"

"Dreadful indeed, my poor girl! But what is it that has put this shocking notion into your head, Lucy? I never heard you allude to any thing of the sort before. How long have you thought this?" said Mary.

"I can hardly tell you," returned the afflicted daughter with another mournful shake of the head. "You may guess how dreadfully painful it must be for me to mention it, but alas! alas! I fear you, and every body must know, as well as I do, her terrible habit of drinking. I suspect that it is this which has affected her brain. Sometimes, when I have called to see her, she has talked to me very wildly, but then I have always come away again as

quickly as possible, because I supposed that she had been drinking, and that there was no duty, but quite the reverse in my staying to listen to her. But yesterday I am quite sure that she had not been drinking at all, yet she talked more wildly than ever! However, I shall see how it is with her to-day. If I find her quiet and reasonable, I shall think it was only some fit of ill-humour, and that she wanted to frighten me; but if my fears prove true, I must ask you, dearest, to let me send to Compton for the apothecary. It is better that I should know the worst at once. May I send for him."

"Of course, my dearest love! we will send for him immediately," replied the pitying heiress, impressing an affectionate kiss on the fair forehead of her friend.

"I shall be very anxious to hear how you find her, Lucy. I won't sit with the old ladies, on purpose that you may see me alone when you come back, and tell me every thing. God bless you, dear! Do not alarm yourself without cause, my poor Lucy, and let us hope the best."

Gratefully and tenderly thanking her affectionate young patroness for all her goodness, Lucy took

her leave, and in a few moments found herself again in her mother's cottage.

It was not more than three hours since she had left it, but the scene was greatly changed. Her mother, perfectly sober, decently dressed, and in high good-humour, had been then left by her, quietly engaged in preparing her own breakfast; and she found her now so completely metamorphosed, that no one not in some degree acquainted with the besetting sin of this miserable woman and its horrible effects, would have been likely to recognise her at all.

She was no longer alone, two female neighbours being present, to Lucy's great annoyance, eagerly listening to the wild and screaming history she was giving of her daughter's adventures.

But distasteful as this unquestionably was, in some respects, it suited admirably well, notwithstanding, with the great object she had in view; for nothing could more completely convey the idea of mental derangement, than both the words and the manner of the widow Dalton.

Lucy immediately perceived that she was greatly intoxicated, and the half-empty condition of the bottle which stood on the table would have removed

all doubt, if she had felt any. Yet, nevertheless, the *idée fixe* which had entire possession of her mind, was more likely to be taken for insanity than drunkenness, by any one less capable of giving a shrewd guess as to the manner in which her morning had been passed than her daughter Lucy was.

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed this precious daughter, raising her clasped hands to heaven, “it is then as I feared! Her reason is gone, totally gone!” and the young lady pulled out her pocket-handkerchief, and appeared to weep bitterly, while her breast heaved with convulsive sobs.

“Gone? What, her senses do you mean?” replied the eldest of the two women who were present when Lucy entered. “Yes, miss, her senses are gone, you may be sure of it. We all know well enough, and a bit too well, maybe, that she is apt to take a drop too much, now and then, and there’s many a neighbour besides me who has seen her overcome by it. But, bless you, miss, tipsiness is no more like this than I’m like the queen. The poor soul is as mad as a March hare.”

“Ay, sure, she’s mad enough,” said the other woman, and if you want to know, miss, what it is as have made her so, I think I can tell you.”

“You think it is her terrible habit of drinking,

I suppose?" said Lucy, still applying her handkerchief to her eyes, as if overwhelmed with sorrow.

"Do I, miss?" returned the woman, laughing. "But I don't though. I knows better than that. The widow Dalton is mad with pride. That's her complaint."

This conversation was carried on during an interval in the noisy clamour which the wretched woman was making, which seemed occasioned by a strong inclination to sleep. But upon Lucy's saying in her natural voice, and without any sobbing, "Indeed? Do you think so, Jenny?" the widow suddenly roused herself, and fixing her large eyes upon her daughter, exclaimed: "Oh! you are there, are you, hussy? Thief that you are. Thief, and worse, too, if worse there is," and making a rush towards her with her arms raised and fists clenched, she stumbled and fell prostrate on the floor.

"There! Now she is altogether on another lay!" cried the woman whom Lucy had addressed as Jenny, "but a minute ago she was talking as if you, miss, was going to be the grandest lady in the land, married to I don't know who, but to somebody that was for sure to make you into a real lady at last. And what's to be done with her now, miss?" she continued, bending over the apparently uncon-

scious woman as she lay with her head supported on the lap of her seemingly affectionate daughter, who had seated herself on the stone floor the moment her mother fell, and gently raising her head, had deposited it with a suitable look of woe in her lap.

“You can’t keep on sitting there, miss. Something must be done in the way of getting her to bed. And who’s to lift her? We three could no more do it than we could fly into the air; why she is as heavy as the church, tower and all.”

“It would be impossible for us to carry her upstairs, Jenny,” replied Lucy, mournfully shaking her head. “If you will run out, both of you, and bring in two men, who could between them carry her to her bed, I would give a sixpence a piece to you, and a sixpence a piece to them. Run then, there’s a dear good woman, will you?”

“I am sure it would be a shame to refuse,” cried one.

“And I am thankful to do your bidding, miss,” said the other; and the next moment Lucy was left alone with her mother, as she wished to be.

Her first object was to secure Vidal’s written promise of marriage, and she thrust her hand, without ceremony or the least loss of time, into the pocket wherein she had seen her mother deposit it a few hours before.

But no such paper was to be found there now.

“She has removed it from her pocket before she plunged herself into this condition,” muttered Lucy, “and, doubtless, has put it in a place of safety; but I must find it before I get her sent off, or half my noble project will be left undone.”

Believing that, at an hour when all the labouring men of the village would be at their work, the task of procuring two, such as were required for the purpose of conveying her colossal parent up stairs, would take time, she ventured to abandon the head of her heavily-snoring mother, while she opened every repository in the house, with which she was acquainted, in order to find the paper, but all her efforts were in vain. It was nowhere to be found.

Either the movement, and the noise which this search occasioned, or else the uneasy position of her head awakened, or aroused, the intoxicated woman, who raised herself into a sitting position, and began to look about her.

Lucy immediately perceived that she had in some degree recovered her senses, and lost no time in putting to her the important question of “Mother, what have you done with the promise of marriage? Let me see that you have lodged it safely.”

“I lodged it, you infamous hussy!” screamed the widow, relapsing into all her former raving vio-

lence, "Where have YOU lodged it; tell me that, girl, or, by the living jingo, I'll tear your dainty fine hair from your head. Where did you put the paper that you stole out of my pocket, you gallows thief, you?"

"What makes you think that I took it out of your pocket, dear mother?" said Lucy, in so gentle a tone, that for a moment it acted as a sedative on the heated brain of the intoxicated woman.

"What makes me say so, girl?" she replied, looking now more terrified than angry. "What makes me say so? Why, because I have lost it, Lucy. And don't go to tell me that you haven't got it, for if you haven't got it, he has, the villain! I hadn't drank a drop, girl; no, nor the bottle wasn't opened when I set to looking for it *here*," and she put her hand into the pocket, where Lucy well remembered that she had placed the paper, but there it was not. "If you haven't taken it, he has. But I'll be revenged on him, if I am hanged for it the hour after!"

Lucy remembered the remarkable embrace which Vidal had asked for, and received from her mother the moment before he left the house. She remembered this, and not a shadow of doubt rested on her mind as to the person in whose possession the promise of marriage remained.

“ Foiled !” she murmured, but her mother heard her not.

“ It can’t be, mother,” she replied, in the same tone of soothing gentleness that she had used previously. “ We shall be sure to find it, mother dear. I will look for it when you have recovered yourself a little. Suppose you were to take a little drop of your usual comfort, mother, not enough to do any harm, but just to prevent your vexing about the paper.”

The unhappy woman fell into the snare, and swallowed the contents of the tempting glass which her unnatural child presented to her.

“ That gentleman that gave you the promise, mother, was a lord—a very rich nobleman; richer a great deal than our squire, and if I marry him, I shall be *my lady*—my lady countess, mother. Won’t that be fine? Won’t it be charming to hear you call me *my lady* ?”

The youthful traitress knew what she was about only too well. The quantity of spirit she had administered, though not large, was sufficient to stimulate her mother to fresh violence, while the words she spoke seized upon her heated imagination, and set her off again in so voluble a style of wild romancing, that no one, knowing her less familiarly than her daugh-

ter, would be likely to doubt her being positively insane.

She was still amusing herself, poor wretch, by making a multitude of grotesque salutations to Lucy, and reiterating the titles of "my lady" and "my lady countess," in addressing her, when the two women who had been sent out to seek assistance returned.

They brought with them the two men whom they had sought for the purpose of conveying the widow Dalton to her bed; but their lengthened absence had probably been as much caused by indulging in the pleasure of describing the patient's strange condition to any neighbours who chose to listen to them, as by the difficulty of finding the assistance they required—a delay which had very effectually assisted the infamous plot of the fair Lucy.

The curiosity of male gossips is probably acted upon more slowly than a similar feeling in females, for it is certainly less usual to see a party of men listening with open mouths and staring eyes to a marvellous story, than a party of women. Nevertheless, the nobler sex are by no means exempt from the Eve-born weakness, and the blacksmith and the butcher's assistant, who now entered the

widow Dalton's cottage, were evidently not without it.

"Why, I don't see but what she could walk up stairs easier than we could carry her," said the blacksmith, without, however, exhibiting any intention to depart, in consequence of perceiving that he was not wanted. "Saving your presence, miss, I suspect as your old lady has had a drop too much. But bless you, she is too much used to it for it to do her any particular great harm. I shouldn't think you need to be uneasy."

Lucy Dalton had not borne her honours so meekly as to have conciliated much kindly feeling among the poor folks of the village of Dalbury. She very rarely exchanged a word with any of them, and this address from the smutty artisan of the smithy, was as novel, as it was disgusting to her.

But this was not the moment to retreat from the contamination of such unsuitable companionship. It only strengthened her purpose, and neutralised every feeling resembling self-reproach, by showing her the imperative necessity of removing to safe distance the parent who thus disgraced her.

Instead, therefore, of turning from the sturdy

speaker of these hateful words, she replied to them in a tone of equal gentleness and grief.

“No, no, my good Robert Jones! Not now—she is not tipsy now! I wish I could think she were, for bad as that is, my good friend, it is nothing in comparison to the horrid idea of her going mad.”

Encouraged by the unwonted familiarity of these words, and still more by the confidential manner in which they were whispered to him, for Lucy wished not they should be heard by her mother, the man stepped further into the room, and approached the woman, to whom the widow Dalton was now talking very rapidly.

Upon seeing him approach, she said,

“So, so, Master Jones, you are determined to be in-time, I see. Well, man, it is all very right and proper. Her ladyship’s horses will all have to be shod, like those of other great folks. You may depend upon that, Robert, and you are quite right to come at once, and ask for the custom. But you all seem to have got hold of the news right soon. How long have you known that my Lucy was going to be married to a lord?”

“Come — neighbour — come ! Keep yourself quiet!” said one of the women, attempting to take

hold of her hand; "you will make your head bad, if you go on so."

"Off with you, you dirty beggar!" screamed Mrs. Dalton, pushing her vehemently away; "are you a fit person to shake hands with the mother of a countess? Off with you, I say, or my lord's men shall come up and drag you to gaol!"

"Is it true, miss?" whispered the blacksmith, confidentially, in Lucy's ear, and winking his eye at her with a roguish twinkle.

Lucy turned her melancholy face towards him, and shook her head, returning his whisper by uttering still lower the words, "Oh—no!"

"Poor soul, she is very bad indeed!" sighed old Jenny; "mad, quite mad! There is no doubt about it, and a shocking sight it is!"

"Mad! you old grey owl! If there was nobody more mad than I, things would go on a deal better in the world. I tell you, fool, that my daughter is going to be married to a lord. What d'ye shake your empty old head for, eh?" screamed the widow Dalton.

"As I live," said the young butcher, "here comes the Compton doctor riding by just in the nick of time, isn't it? Shall I call to 'un to come in, miss?"

Greatly rejoiced at this lucky chance, Lucy immediately nodded her assent, which she strengthened by saying aloud, "Oh! yes, yes! Beg him to come in, for pity's sake! I have never seen her so bad before. This is downright raving, isn't it, Jenny?"

On hearing these words, the widow started up, and turning fiercely to her daughter, exclaimed,

"Bad! what d'ye mean by bad, hussy? I beg pardon, I mean your ladyship. What does your dear, beautiful ladyship mean by saying that I am bad? I am neither mad nor bad, my lady countess. And if you'll turn all these poor, beggarly, dirty wretches out of the room, you and I will begin to look for you know what. Won't we, my darling? Turn 'em out, head and heels! Turn 'em out, I say!"

At this moment the blacksmith re-entered the room with Mr. Simmons the apothecary, who immediately addressing himself to Lucy, with whom he was well acquainted from having frequently seen her at the park, inquired whether there was any sick person there whom she wished him to see.

"May I speak to you one moment alone, sir?" replied Lucy, leading the way to the little back kitchen.

"Certainly," said Mr. Simmons, and without paying any attention to the wild gabble of Mrs. Dalton, he followed her out.

"I dare say you are aware, sir, that the unhappy woman you saw in the next room is my mother?" said Lucy, with mingled sorrow and humility. "It is probable that you have often seen her before, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Dalton. I know that this is her house," replied the apothecary.

"It is for her, Mr. Simmons, that I took the liberty of asking you to come in," and here Lucy again drew forth her pocket-handkerchief.

"Is she ill?" demanded the apothecary, with a look which said very plainly "I know that she is drunk."

"I fear that she is very, oh ! very ill," replied Lucy, appearing to be very strongly agitated. "It would be very silly and quite in vain, Mr. Simmons," she continued, "were I to attempt to conceal the dreadful fact that she drinks," and here she stopped again, being for a moment quite unable to go on, as it seemed, upon a subject so every way distressing.

"These things are great misfortunes, my dear, wherever they happen," replied the worthy apothecary.

cary. "But, as you truly say, it is great folly for the friends, in such cases, to attempt any concealments about it. It is one of those things that never can be altogether concealed."

"But at this moment, my dear sir, it is not *this*, terrible as it is, which occasions the misery you see me suffering. There is something worse, oh! greatly worse than that, Mr. Simmons. I have great, alas! I have every reason to fear that my unhappy mother is insane!"

"God bless my soul! That is really very terrible, indeed," replied Mr. Simmons. "How long is it, Miss Lucy, that you have seen reason to suspect this? I have never heard it mentioned before."

"For many months, sir," replied the sobbing Lucy. "But I have kept on hoping, and hoping, that I was mistaken; and it was the more easy for me to deceive myself, because it was so likely that what must have been taken at once for insanity in another person, might in her be only the result of her lamentable failing. But, alas! I can delude myself in this way no longer; it has always been, and ever must be, impossible for me to prevent her drinking, and I have, therefore, for years, in short, as long as I can remember any thing, been accustomed to see

her under the influence of intoxication; but her present condition is quite different. She has now the appearance of having one or two absurd ideas fixed in her imagination, about which she goes on talking incessantly, and yet there is sometimes a mixture of reason that shows, I should think, that her intellect is not quite gone. And oh! sir, when I see this, I cannot help thinking that, perhaps, if she were to be put under the best medical treatment, such as they say the asylum at Barnley offers, she might recover."

"Well, my good Miss Lucy, if I see reason to be of that opinion, which it seems to me very likely that I shall be, there will be no difficulty about that, for your good friend the squire is one of the governors, and I myself, as apothecary to the establishment, have interest enough to get a patient in. So set your dutiful heart at rest, my dear young lady, and be quite sure that every thing that can be done for her shall be done, and that without any further loss of time, which is the most important thing of all in such cases."

Lucy returned the most earnest thanks for his kindness, and then, endeavouring to recover her composure, led the way back again to the presence

of the patient, with a look in which affection and terror were blended.

The train had been skilfully laid, and failed in no point.

A few questions put to her by the apothecary, a few dutiful and gentle words from her daughter, such as "No, no, mother dear, think a minute; you don't mean that," and a few trifling observations from the bystanders, upon the pride that they had long thought had turned her brain, sufficed to make the wretched woman storm and rave, and assert the wildest and most improbable things in the world, such as that the gentleman called Vidal, by those who did not know him, was in reality a lord and a nobleman, and that his wife would be a countess; but that it would not be Miss Mary, but her daughter Lucy, whom she sometimes called hussy and slut, and sometimes her beautiful darling. In proof of her words, she promised speedily to show them all a written promise of marriage, that was, if his lordship, the earl, had not picked her pocket. In short, she went on raving to the heart's content of her detestable daughter, till no doubt was left on the mind of the medical man that she ought to be removed to the Lunatic Asylum with as little delay as possible.

A few words between the professional gentleman and Mr. Clementson completed the success of the plot. The good squire's carriage was kindly lent for the unhappy woman's conveyance (whose violence, however, rendered a strait-waistcoat absolutely necessary), and the village street of Dalbury no longer echoed to the loud voice of the widow Dalton.

END OF VOL. II.

THE
ATTRACTIVE MAN.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,
AUTHORESS OF THE "VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS
IN AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE ATTRACTIVE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

FOR a few days Miss Lucy Dalton hung her head, and appeared to be exceedingly out of spirits.

But her kind-hearted friend, Mary, talked to her, with a great deal of good sense, on the folly of giving herself up to grief, because her unfortunate mother was placed where every thing that medical skill could suggest, would be done for her recovery. The two governesses also pointed out to her how much she had to be thankful for both in her mother's situation and her own; and even the squire himself (though Mary still thought he was not quite

so fond of Lucy as he ought to be) condescended to remonstrate with her on the subject.

So Lucy thought it was her duty, as she told them, to listen with respectful attention to all that was so kindly said to her on the subject, and promised that she would endeavour to forget all that it was disagreeable to remember; which promise she so faithfully kept, that it soon became difficult to believe that she ever thought of the madhouse or her mother at all.

Meanwhile, the preparations for Mary's marriage proceeded. But Mary seemed as indifferent on this subject as Lucy was concerning her mother. It appeared, indeed, at that time, as if every thing in the shape of business annoyed the heiress; for when her father mentioned some few alterations in the house, in order to make it a complete residence for a larger family, and one where there was to be distinct accommodation for two gentlemen, she told him that there was nothing in the world she hated so very particularly, as talking or thinking about workmen, and that, therefore, she should be very much obliged to him if he would not say any more about it—a petition which she concluded in these words:

“Don't look vexed, dear papa! There will be

plenty of time! The presentation to the queen, and all that, will take months and months, you know, to get through; and if the dear darling old house must be pulled about our ears, let it be done when we are away, dear papa! And don't let me hear any more about it till then; that will be quite soon enough."

As this petition was concluded with a kiss, the reasoning was found (*not* unanswerable, for it was immediately replied to in the same language, but) incontrovertible, and so nothing more was said about altering the house.

As to the wedding clothes, of course they were not to be thought of till Mary went to London; when, for the first time in her life, she was to have the immense advantage of selecting fine things for herself, instead of receiving what it pleased her dressmaker and milliner to send. So the preparations which, as I have said, continued to go on, were very much out of sight, being altogether confined to the chambers of Wilson and Wilmot, solicitors, Pump-court, Temple. What was going on there had been clearly, and very satisfactorily explained to Mr. Vidal, and that was quite enough; Mary neither knew nor cared any thing about it.

And here imperious truth obliges me to confess

that my heiress, who, though by no means intended for a heroine, is a favourite with me, did not exactly conduct herself as she ought to have done. For, notwithstanding the unbounded love and indulgence of her father, she had not, from first to last, ever confided to him the real state of her heart. It would have been greatly better for many people if she had.

* * * * *

I scarcely know how it has happened, but I find, upon consideration, that I have reached this advanced stage of my labours, without having any heroine at all.

If indeed, my readers will accept Lucy in that capacity, they are welcome to take her as such, and she is certainly a consistent character in her way. But as for either Clara or Mary, they can lay claim to no merit of the kind; neither are their inconsistencies at all of a heroic nature, both of them, poor girls! having respectively fallen in love with gentlemen, who, on their parts, had respectively made up their minds not to have them. And, moreover (which was a great deal more unheroic still) they had both soberly and deliberately made up *their* minds to marry somebody else.

I now find this deficiency of a heroine exceed-

ingly inconvenient, as it greatly impedes the natural progress of the narrative, and obliges me to appear inconsistent myself, when, in point of fact, all the inconsistency is in my people. Having, however, respectfully offered this apology to my reader, I shall let the story go on as it can, without making myself uneasy at its want of smoothness.

* * * * *

As to my hero, he was always himself—perfectly happy, perfectly charming, and invariably prosperous in all things, whether great or small.

At an archery breakfast, at Lady Randal's, he not only received from her delicate hand the beautiful *ormolu* quiver, containing a dozen winged silver pens, but he won a bet for her from Sir William Monkton, who had laid a wager of a *soirée dansante*, with Champagne supper, that Vidal would not throw six arrows successively into the bull's eye of Lady Sarah's little target.

At the Dowager Mrs. General Springfield's, he had won golden opinions from all the family, and at least silver ones from every body else, by enabling her eldest daughter to assign a name to some beautiful old English verses in her album, which, though themselves familiar to many, had set

every one at fault when the author's name was asked for.

So admirably natural was the tone of fond enthusiasm, with which, when the oft-repeated question was put to him, he had answered it by pronouncing the name of "Surrey!" that it never occurred to any one, to suspect that he had never in his life heard the lines before.

On Sir William Monkton, he had conferred a very serious obligation, by relating to him with great minuteness of detail, accompanied by names given at full length, a most provokingly mysterious history relative to a continental love adventure, in which a noble lady, declared by people in general to be one of the most unimpeachable women in Europe, was very deeply concerned.

And as to his host, his simple, unmagnificent, but also, unwearying host, it would be an endless task to tell how often in the course of every day he contrived to make his heart vibrate within him by talking of basins, and beds, of *very* recently-discovered richness, which he had either heard of, or personally examined, in some of the most remote corners of the earth, all of which should speedily be made to render up some of their choicest morsels

as specimens for the dearly-beloved little museum of his most dearly-beloved friend.

It may often be remarked that a bold bad man may go on long, very long, in his wickedness (provided the said wickedness be not of a kind to make him amenable to the law of the land) without being "pulled up" by the finer natures, against which he may have jostled in his course.

So it was with Vidal in his affair with Clara Maynard.

Feelings, stronger far than he could comprehend, would have prevented Clara herself, or the worthy gentlewomen her aunts, either, from recounting the circumstances of his conduct to her even without their having promised secrecy, and the rumour that he had proposed for her died away without leaving a trace on the memory of any one. The promise of secrecy he had asked for, had, however, been very strictly kept. But if no such promise had been given, Clara and her aunts, too, would have been equally silent.

Luckily for the three ladies of the Town Head House, an attack of influenza seized upon Miss Anne (perhaps her low spirits might have assisted its development), which made her really very ill, and gave them all a sufficient excuse for staying at home.

And when Vidal heard of it, did he not again bless "his star?"

Even with Lucy, notwithstanding the vehemence of her character, he managed so admirably well, that he contrived to make their private friendship a secret source of joy and triumph, instead of annoyance and danger, which it must have been to most men. A sort of triumph which few could have obtained.

But Lucy was still young in years, and Vidal was the first man who had ever awakened a feeling of passion in her heart. It requires time, as well as a roving disposition, to conquer a first love in the heart of a woman. Nevertheless, their first meeting after the departure of the widow Dalton for the lunatic asylum, did not pass quite smoothly.

Lucy's *low spirits* during the first few days which followed this event, prevented her from attending her young lady to two dinner parties which took place in the neighbourhood *before* the time she had fixed upon in her own mind, for finding that it was no use to grieve for what was inevitable. But this oppressive state of spirits, did not prevent her indulging herself by long solitary walks in the most sheltered and out-of-the-way places in the Dalbury domain; and the (of course) constant visits of Mr.

Vidal at the park, afforded ample opportunities of confessing to him, with little more difficulty than by merely naming a particular point of the compass, that notwithstanding her grief, she should prefer to

“Wander not unseen.”

In consequence of some such hint, the fair damsel had not taken above three turns within the covert of a leafless grove, rendered very picturesquely gloomy by a mixture of holly-bushes and fir-trees, on the day following that on which the widow was incarcerated, before the graceful figure of Vidal was seen approaching from under a mass of dark evergreens in the distance.

As soon as she saw him, she stood still, and he, quickening his pace, was at her side almost in a moment.

“How sweetly kind this is of you, my Lucy!” he exclaimed, in a voice so tender, that it seemed to render every species of quarrel impossible. “How horrible is the restraint,” he continued, after saluting her rosy lips. “How horribly hateful is the restraint we endure *là bas*! Is it not, my love? Tell me that you suffer from it as well as I do, or I shall go mad!”

“Preserve your senses, Theodore,” she replied, “for though we have got wonderfully well through our business, there are still many things which

will not go equally well, if you have not your wits, and all your wits about you. We must not flatter ourselves that all our difficulties are over yet."

"Let us at least enjoy the repose which the safe guardianship of your terrible mother gives us, my Lucy! Such a visit as she threatened to favour the squire with, might, in truth, have worked us woe, by effectually and for ever cutting off the supplies! Neither you nor I, sweet love, can live without the yellow gold; and if my speculation here had failed, it might have been long ere I had hit upon another so promising."

"True," replied Lucy, gravely. "Large estates and noble mansions are not always to be had for the asking; but while very rationally taking care not to endanger the hoped-for possession of these, you need not have given so disagreeable a proof of your want of confidence in me as was shown by your picking my mother's pocket of the promise of marriage. It was unworthy of you, Mr. Vidal."

For half a moment this very direct accusation remained unanswered, for Vidal was in doubt whether he should stoutly deny it, or lightly and laughingly admit its truth. He took a middle course; he denied it not, neither did he admit it lightly.

“My dearest love!” he said, “how is it possible that you should be offended by an act so completely in conformity to the plans which had been concerted between us? Would you have wished, Lucy, that your mother should have exhibited that paper to Mr. Clementson?”

“The question is too idle a one to be answered gravely,” replied Lucy, colouring with anger. “Was that the fear that made you commit so meanly suspicious an act? Did you really think it was my purpose to permit her thus to frustrate our object? Did you really think so poorly of my skill?”

“But how was she to be prevented from doing so whenever the whim might take her, except by removing the dangerous document from her hands?” demanded Vidal, with a most candid air of innocent astonishment at the question.

“And why should you have feared to trust *me* with that paper, Theodore? What could have been the feeling which led you to take such means for guarding against treachery in the woman you profess to love?” demanded Lucy.

“And wherefore,” he replied, “would it have been better for you to pick your mother’s pocket, than for me? I really am at a loss to comprehend

your meaning, my Lucy. I should have thought myself very negligent of our common interest had I left such a task for you to perform, easily perceiving, as I should have thought you must have done also, that if she chose to keep it out of your hands she would have found it a very easy matter to do so. For what purpose, my sweet love, did you wish to have it in your own possession?"

There was in this last question something that seemed to alarm the tender feelings of the enamoured girl. Her whole manner instantly changed, and resting her head upon the shoulder of her lover as they slowly paced side by side over the fallen leaves, she said:

"You know well enough, my Theodore, that I had no wish to possess it at all. How could I, when the only effect it was calculated to produce was to destroy all the hopes of enjoyment which now seem so brightly to open before me? No; Theodore, no! I did not want to possess that idle paper; but I did wish to possess your confidence, and what you did, suggested to me a doubt on this subject that was inexpressibly painful."

"Then chase such doubts for ever from your heart, my lovely friend," replied Vidal, with a fond caress, "would that the idle paper existed still, that

I might prove to you how little cause you have for them."

Lucy was strongly tempted to say, "Then prove it still, by again writing such an idle paper, and entrusting it to my safe keeping."

But something within her whispered "*You had better not, as yet.*" And she listened to the whisper.

And then the conversation between them went on with every appearance of the most confiding tenderness on both sides, and a multitude of pleasant schemes were arranged as to the manner in which the future existence of both was to be embellished by their mutual love, and by such arrangements as might make the revenues of Dalbury available to their enjoyment, without awakening the suspicions of either the squire or his daughter, the excessive gullibility of both bringing their interview to an end amid shouts of laughter.

CHAPTER II.

AND now let us follow poor Arthur Lexington to Paris, in order to see whether the mixed motive of duty to his aunt, and a longing for relief from misery for himself, which took him there, was likely to be followed by any favourable result.

He found Madame Marathone, and her juvenile husband, living in a small, but very elegantly furnished apartment in the Rue Montabor. As he did not intend to throw himself, either by day or by night, on the hospitality of this strangely matched pair, he did not deem it necessary to send any announcement beforehand of his intended visit, and when he was shown into a small back drawing-room, completely lined with well-filled book-shelves, it was evident to him that the singular-looking young man, who was seated at a table covered with papers, in the midst, understood not the least

in the world who he was from the servant's extraordinary mode of announcing him, which was, to the best of my orthography, "Monsieur Artexiton."

Now Monsieur Marathone, being very nearly as familiar with the English language as he was with his own, had no idea that the names "Arthur Lexington," with which he was perfectly well acquainted, could be thus converted into one; and though, upon perceiving the very distinguished-looking individual thus announced, he immediately rose from his easy chair with an air of great civility, Arthur plainly perceived that his young uncle had not the slightest idea who it was that he was receiving.

It was, therefore, absolutely necessary that he should introduce himself, which he did by saying, in very good French, "Your domestic, sir, has caught my name so imperfectly that I must take the liberty of repeating it myself. I am Arthur Lexington, and have the honour of being the nephew of madame."

"Ah! sir! you are expected!" replied M. Marathone, in English, "and I can venture to assure you that your excellent aunt will be greatly rejoiced by your arrival. She is the most confidential of wives, and favoured me with a sight of the letter by

which she entreated your company. But truly it will be necessary for you to guard your judgment against believing the many flattering things she says of me. She is a dear good woman! and loves me only too well! Where there is real affection, Mr. Lexington, disparity of years does little towards destroying it!"

Arthur Lexington smiled as he replied, that it would be difficult to believe such a feeling could exist without some good cause for it, and that he thought it very likely that he should himself be inclined to consider his aunt as excusable.

Arthur's eyes, as he said this, were fixed upon one of the very handsomest faces he had ever seen.

M. Marathone was about thirty years of age, and his features and form had all the perfection of manly strength of limb and firmness of feature, which is generally attained at that age, but very rarely before it. Had Arthur Lexington seen him when, about ten years before, he had first married his aunt, he would have thought the union more ridiculous, but less lamentable. As he now stood and looked steadfastly at the noble figure, and splendidly handsome face of the man before him, the idea of his old aunt, rouged and wigged as he had last seen her, rose before him, and there was something so unna-

tural, so terrible in the idea of her being that man's wife, that he shuddered as he thought of it.

Marathone was looking at him, too, and perceived that some painful thought had crossed his mind. What it might be he knew not, but he guessed, and felt so perfectly assured that he had guessed rightly, that it would have been very difficult at that moment to shake his belief. Yet he was quite wrong, for he thought the painful emotion he had seen arose from Lexington's recollecting that the tall fellow before him stood between him and his aunt's wealth; whereas, in fact, the thinking, Jaques-minded Arthur, was lamenting in his heart that so fine a specimen of humanity should have sold itself to an old woman; the lamentation being as free from all thought of self, as if his spirit had already shuffled off this mortal coil, and was looking down from heaven upon what passed on earth.

Both gentlemen, however, dismissed their inward thoughts, for the purpose of properly regulating their outward actions. Arthur expressed his dutiful hope that Madame Marathone was well, and M. Marathone, after having relieved his anxiety on that point, requested him to be seated, and hoped, on his side, that Arthur did not feel fatigued by his journey.

After a minute or two of such conversation as might be expected under the circumstances, both gentlemen being perfectly well-bred, M. Marathone got up, and said he would himself have the pleasure of communicating to his lady the agreeable news of her nephew's arrival.

Of course, Arthur, as soon as he was gone, took up, as every other man in the nineteenth century would have done, one of the newspapers which lay upon the table, and occupied himself for a few minutes by perusing the record of the editor's indignation against various government measures; but as no aunt appeared, and as his handsome uncle came not again, Arthur finding that his thoughts were beginning to travel back in a very foolish manner towards Compton, began to look about him on the well-lined shelves, and on the various new volumes liberally scattered for present use upon the table.

On the shelves, he presently perceived there might be found a very precious selection of both old and new books from all the countries of the earth, where literature had taken root; and on the table, there seemed to be a collection of precisely every thing which the strongly divided, but greatly mixed worlds of London and Paris, were at that particular moment talking about.

“A gentleman! a scholar! and a man of taste!” muttered Lexington. “It is most strange that such an one should have married my ridiculous old aunt! There will be some interest in observing how they live together; but it will be a painful study, too. I wonder that the old lady’s vanity never tempted her to show him off before: I always fancied that she was ashamed of him.”

Considerably more than half-an-hour elapsed before either his reading or his meditations were disturbed, and then the door opened, and a miserably thin, and very aged-looking woman, entered. She appeared to be alone, and advanced towards him with a more rapid step than he could have expected from her appearance. But, notwithstanding her speed, and the moderate size of the room, the door was again opened before she reached him, and M. Marathone entered.

“Oh! here is my dear husband!” were her first words, instead of “here is my dear nephew!” as might have been expected, and Arthur, as he took her hand, and received her salute, fancied that she trembled; but, in fact, she was very old, and, perhaps, in coming into the room, had moved more rapidly than was usual with her. Arthur knew that she was his father’s senior, and that she

must be above seventy years of age; but he had not expected to see a face so wrinkled, or a form so bent. She was still rouged, poor soul! and still wigged, yet her appearance no longer suggested the idea of a woman who was endeavouring to look young, but of a person who had so utterly lost all hope of looking like any thing but an old witch, that she had given up the struggle, and went on in her old routine, regardless of consequences.

“ You must present me, madame, to your nephew,” said the master of the house, placing his commanding figure in frightfully striking juxtaposition with that of his decrepid wife.

“ Assuredly, my dear!” replied the old woman, with a singularly queer glance of her once brilliant eye, “ can I have a greater joy? Arthur Lexington! permit me to present you to the best of husbands, and the most noble-minded of men! M. Marathone, this is my nephew—Arthur Lexington; the only son of my only brother, and indeed, as far as I know, the only relative I have left on the earth. I believe he is a very good sort of young man.”

“ I am happy to meet you, sir,” said Arthur, bowing to him.

“ Nothing could give me greater pleasure,” said M. Marathone, returning the bow.

“You are altered, Arthur, a good deal altered since I saw you last,” said the old lady; “you neither look so young, nor so gay. Ten or twelve years will make a difference at any age, but it makes less difference, I dare say, in me than in you. For you have lost your dear father, who loved you so very much, and then you have never been fortunate enough to marry, you know; whereas I have always been, that is, I mean since my second marriage, so completely and superlatively happy, that I don’t know how to believe that I look as many years older since we parted, as you do.”

“It is a great pleasure to hear you say so, my dear aunt,” replied Arthur, with a smile; and as he spoke he turned his eyes towards his handsome uncle, as if to thank him for the kindness with which it appeared evident he had treated his aged relative.

But he was startled by the strangely earnest look with which that gentleman’s large violet-coloured eyes were looking at him, from beneath their long black lashes. The instant their glances met, however, the expression of M. Marathone’s was changed, and a charmingly benignant smile replied to that of Arthur.

“I have great pleasure, dear Arthur,” said he,

in giving you this opportunity of seeing that your good aunt is a happy wife, notwithstanding the disparity of our years. Indeed, I was very anxious that you should come to visit us; for I sometimes regret that so few people are permitted to see how really happy is the life that we live together."

"Few people!" repeated Arthur, with surprise. "Why, my dear aunt, when I last visited you, I thought you were the very gayest of the gay. Though certain it is that the circle in which I live is so small a one, that what I should call many people, M. Marathone might call few."

"Oh, it is not that!" replied M. Marathone, "when I say few, I mean it very literally; but this, as I dare say you will easily believe, does not arise from any difficulty as to finding society if we wished it, but the fact is, that from early boyhood my tastes have been those of a literary man, and I soon found that my wife had dispositions in exact accordance with my own."

"My aunt!" cried Arthur, with an involuntary accent of surprise.

M. Marathone smiled with a beautiful expression of gentle drollery, if such a phrase may be allowed, and replied, "I do not wonder, my dear Mr. Arthur, that you should testify surprise at hearing

this. The mind of madame developed itself late; nay, I think it possible that without her attachment to me she might never have known herself the extent of her own capacity. But now, I am convinced she will tell you herself, if you will ask her, that she has no pleasure equal to that which she derives from study. You must do me the favour of conversing with her."

Arthur turned towards his aunt, but did not question her further than by making her a smiling bow and looking as if he were ready to listen.

"Nay, it is quite true, my dear Arthur," she said, with a little nervous twitching of her hands, by which the fingers of the right seemed to be strongly pressing the thumb of the left, "I don't care now for any thing in the world but study, I have left off every thing else."

"You look as if you thought this strange, Mr. Lexington; but I suspect you will think it stranger still when I tell you that I have made her my confidant on a literary subject of immense importance to me. It is one in which secrecy is especially necessary. I am, my dear nephew, let me have the honour of thus addressing you, I am about to publish a work, which I have a conviction will raise me to the very highest pinnacle of European fame,

yes, Mr. Lexington, and of transatlantic fame also. Why should we so churlishly deny to the younger brothers of the human family the right to sit in judgment on the speculations of their elders? Why, when speaking of opinions delivered by the whole civilised world in concert, do we for ever call it *European* fame? At any rate, Mr. Lexington, mine, I will venture to predict, will go farther."

Arthur Lexington bowed because "*his uncle*" had made a pause as if he expected an answer, and he really knew not how to give him any other.

"I would not willingly extend my communications to such a length as to fatigue you, my dear sir," resumed the handsome student, observing the rather embarrassed look of his nephew, "but as I am aware that it is natural you should wish to converse with your excellent aunt in the unconstrained liberty of a *tête-à-tête*, I have said thus much to show you that if Madame Marathone enters with you upon the subject of my work it is with my consent, and that you will commit no breach of confidence in listening to her. Only, before I depart, let me impress upon your mind, that for the present, I mean to preserve the very strictest incognito, for to my feeling, the fame acquired by Sir Walter Scott

while he continued to keep his name unknown, was ten thousand times more gratifying (frivolous as from the nature of his productions it must have been when compared to mine) than any other he ever achieved. *This*, together with some other reasons not worth mentioning, make me particularly anxious that my name should remain unknown. You will, I am convinced, from a sense of honour keep this for ever in your mind, and now, farewell till dinner. My love," he added, turning to his wife, "indulge yourself freely in speaking to your nephew of our great secret. You need not trouble him with any minor subjects."

As M. Marathone pronounced these last words, he again fixed his fine eyes upon his wife with a very remarkable expression; but in the next moment he smiled upon her with so much sweetness, and with so much grace, as he left the room, that all trace of this strange look was immediately forgotten, and Arthur, though rather amused by his new relative's choice of a literary confidant, as well as by the unusual means he took to preserve his literary incognito, could not resist being captivated both by his appearance and manner, and felt that if his old aunt had only been twenty years younger, which would still have left her an old woman in

comparison with Marathone, he could almost have forgiven her.

The aunt and nephew were now left alone; and Arthur, seating himself near her, said, "What is this literary secret, my dear aunt, which M. Marathone has so obligingly permitted you to confide to me?"

The old lady looked cautiously round the room, and even opened the door in order to reconnoitre the passage beyond it; and upon finding that all was safe, she approached her nephew, looked at him very earnestly for a few minutes, and then murmured the words,

"Thank God!"

Lexington knew not what to make of her; she looked so miserably pale and thin, that it was difficult not to suppose that she must be in very ill health; but there was a briskness in her manner of moving, and a vivacity in the glance of her eye, that seemed to say, that notwithstanding her sickly appearance, she was younger, both in mind and body, than he had expected to find her.

Having uttered the above-mentioned exclamation, Madame Marathone seated herself on the sofa, and made a sign to her nephew to place himself in a

chair opposite and very close to her. He did so, and she then addressed him as follows:—

“ You won’t deny, Arthur, that my husband is very handsome?”

“ No, indeed, my dear aunt,” he replied, with some inclination to laugh at this unexpected commencement of their confidential conversation, “ I really think M. Marathone one of the handsomest men I ever saw.”

“ Good!” replied the old lady. “ Then you can understand how it came to pass that I fell so distractedly in love with him?”

Arthur bowed his head in reply to this question, but he did not speak.

“ Very well,” resumed his aunt, “ then I need say no more upon the embarrassing subject. You can of course guess, without my telling you, that if it had not been for this irresistible passion I should naturally have left all my money to you; but love is not to be resisted, you know.”

As she said all this, the old lady kept looking round and round the room, and up to the ceiling, and into the chimney, in so very strange a manner, that Lexington began very seriously to entertain the idea that she was deranged. But as he conceived that the best way of treating her, if this were the

case, would be to humour, and listen to her patiently, he merely cast a furtive glance upon the table near them in order to ascertain that there were no knives or scissors there, and then repeated his bow to her in token that he wished her to go on.

“ You are a kind, good young man, Arthur,” she resumed, in an altered voice, while her eyes filled with tears, and her lips trembled with emotion. “ You are really good and kind, for you do not look angry with me, and yet I have deserved it.”

But these last words were uttered in so low a whisper that he scarcely felt sure that he had heard them rightly.

There was a moment's silence, and then, having recovered herself, she began again: “ You have seen my husband, and seem aware of his extraordinary beauty. But in justice to myself, Arthur, I must make you understand that I never could have been devoted to him, as I am now, which is something quite entirely out of the common way, had he possessed no power but what his beauty gave him; but—”

And here again she began to look about the room, as if she fancied she should see some person, or thing, fleeing through it.

Lexington began to feel himself very uncomfortable. There is always, even in the stoutest hearts,

a strange mysterious feeling that seems allied to fear, when in presence of a being whose reason seems wandering into regions where minds in the ordinary condition cannot follow it. In short Arthur felt that he should be extremely glad if his handsome uncle would appear again. The *tête-à-tête*, however, was not yet over.

“But,” resumed Madame Marathone, with solemnity, “his powers of mind,” and here she touched her forehead, “his powers of mind are,” and here she again lowered her voice, “miraculous!”

“Indeed!” said Arthur, quietly.

“Ah! my dear nephew, I perceive, that like every body else, you are disposed to believe that I am not speaking *literally* in saying this. But *you*, at least, will find that you are mistaken, for he has permitted me to open my heart to you, and to you alone, on the subject. All I have to beg of you is, that you will not think I am talking nonsense, or rather, that I am talking like a mad woman. I do assure you that I am no more mad than you are, my dear Arthur; but nobody, I believe, was ever placed before in so very remarkable a position. I will not deny that I suspect my husband did, in the first instance, determine to marry me for the sake of my fortune,

because I now know pretty well that he had not a farthing in the world, though I assure you that I was far from thinking so when I married him. However, that matters but little, married we are. But it was not done without my taking very good care, that in case I did not find him so very well off as I expected, he should not have the power of ruining me, or himself either, by running through my money, which I dare say you know is all ready cash, in the Bank of England. I was very fair with him, perfectly fair, as I am sure he would be ready to tell you, if you were to ask him. I told him the very same hour that I consented to be his wife, that I had an income of three thousand two hundred and seventy-six pounds from the British funds, and that I asked no greater felicity than the pleasure of spending it with him. I told him, also, that if we were happy together, I had no doubt I should feel disposed to follow my late husband's good example, and leave by far the greater portion of my wealth to him. I thought of you, Arthur, even at that moment, and intended to remember you in my will. But then I went on to tell M. Marathone, who was holding my hand the whole time with the greatest tenderness, that I would not marry till my old English friend and lawyer, Mr.

Brown, had drawn a settlement that should protect the principal of my fortune from being squandered either by myself or any one else; and to this he made not the least objection, and it was done."

"At any rate," thought Lexington, "if my good aunt be afflicted by mental malady, it is of the monomaniacal kind, for assuredly no old lady can appear to know better what she is talking about than she does now."

"Well, Arthur," resumed Madame Marathone, "we were married, and upon the whole—" But here again she stopped, throwing the same sort of fearful glance round the chamber as before.

Upon which Arthur, whose ideas of her insanity was much shaken by the clearness of her pecuniary statement, ventured to say: "What is it you are looking for, my dear aunt? Your eye wanders about the room as if you thought that you should see some bird flying round it."

"Hush, hush, hush!" whispered the old lady, in a voice of mystery, "I think all is quite safe; but it is needful that I should look about me. Listen, nephew, listen and you shall know all. Let me see! where was I?"

"You were telling me, when you stopped short in order to look round the room," said Arthur, "that upon the whole—"

“ Yes, my dear Arthur,” she resumed, “ upon the whole, my beautiful young husband was not unkind to me. The chief quarrel between us was about my milliner’s bills. He did not think it right for me to spend so much money in dress as I had been used to do, and to say the truth, he seemed a good deal inclined to get all my income into his own hands.”

But here again she once more glanced curiously round the room, and even got up, and examined sundry corners and recesses, nay, even looked under the drapery of the arm-chairs and sofa.

“ For his own use,” she added, finishing her sentence with a sigh, but it was a sigh not so much of grief as of a feeling of relief from the alarm, whatever it was, which had occasioned her last and most scrupulous search.

“ By degrees, however,” she continued, “ he got into a way of teasing me, by asking me very often if I had made my will, to which I always answered ‘ NO,’ because, Arthur, I had so often heard stories of people being made away with after making their wills. But at last, though he always kept on more or less about the will, he took so very much to study (he was always a great reader) that I began to think he did not care so very much about

the money as he used to do, and then I lost that horrible fear that I told you of, about what might happen to me after making my will, for I did not think that gentlemen who did nothing hardly but read and write, could have any such very horrid thoughts, and then it was so much better to live with him when he was kind than when he was cross, that I thought at last that I would do what he asked me, and I did do it, Arthur, I made my will, and left him every thing except one poor thousand pounds to you. But it did not answer at all. It is a whole twelvemonth since I did it, and here I am, as you see, alive and well too, very well, I think, for my time of life, if it were not, Arthur, for the quantity of sad, shocking thoughts that I have got into my mind."

"Surely, ma'am, you do not now think that your life is in any danger from Monsieur Marathone?" said Arthur, with considerable anxiety, as he looked at her attenuated form and pallid features. "Are you not, as you say yourself, alive and well?"

"Yes, Arthur, I am well," she replied, "and I feel no fear of any act on the part of M. Marathone, that would make me otherwise. The terror I speak of is of another kind."

And here the old lady's eyes again began to

wander, but, closing them firmly, and then shaking her head, as if she would throw from her the thoughts which disturbed her, she said, "I dare say it is very foolish to torment myself as I do. I believe we are very safe here."

"Safe, my dear aunt!" said Arthur, cheerfully, "to be sure we are. Why should you doubt it?"

"I will make my story as short as I can, Arthur," she returned, "and when I have got to the end of it, you will understand it. The chief evil that came to me after I made my will was a sort of spying and watching me every minute of my life almost. This did not begin directly, for just at first we were the very best friends in the world together, and he gave me one of the most beautiful pink satin bonnets that you ever saw in your life; and then, another time, a sky blue silk gown, that was lovely, so that I could not help feeling quite glad that I had done what seemed to please him so greatly. But then, by degrees, Arthur, he began to grow cross again," and here the poor woman seemed to restrain her tears with difficulty, "he began to grow very cross, and one day I was foolish enough to say that I wished I had not done as he asked me, and that if my will were to be made over again, it was not one dress, nor two either, that would induce me

to make it in the same manner. Those rash words, Arthur, destroyed all the happiness that was left me, for from that time to this I have hardly ever known the comfort of having a single moment without being watched; and it has been gradually going on, from bad to worse. I don't believe I should ever have found out the real meaning of it, if it had not been for my faithful old servant, Martha Squab. I don't know whether you remember Martha Squab, but your poor father would, if he were here. She lived with me before I was first married, and would never leave me till she was turned very cruelly out of the house by my ungrateful husband (here came another frightened look round the room), about three months ago. She was a very superior sort of person was poor Martha, and came of a very decent family. But she had no relations, except an only brother, who was a London tailor, in good business when she came to me, and, before he died, Mr. Squab got up into great fashion, and invited her over to see him. But though he was living by her account quite like a gentleman, and would willingly have kept her with him (for his wife was dead), she would not give me up, but came back to me just the same as before. The only thing

she seemed much to think about was her nephew, who, she said, was very handsome, and quite an accomplished fine gentleman, but he died very soon after his father, I believe; or else he travelled into distant countries somewhere; in short, he has never been heard of since, so that I was her only friend. Poor dear Martha!"

"And why was she dismissed, dear aunt?" said Arthur, kindly.

"Because Monsieur Marathone suspected, I believe, that she was cleverer than he wished her to be, for she had got it into her head, poor thing, owing, I think, to her tender feelings about her own nephew, that it was my duty to make another will; and I won't pretend to say that I did not agree with her, for I knew that I had been sadly deceived, before I made the present one, but I am sorry to say, my dear Arthur, that I was much too ignorant to know how to set about it, and as to having any lawyer come here to help me, I will leave you to judge for yourself whether it was likely I should be able to do that, so Martha said that she would manage it, if I would only tell her what I should now like to do with my money. But even her saying that to me, was not done without difficulty, and she only managed it by whispering, as she was lacing my stays

one morning, '*take to your bed for a day or two.*' This she said as if she was complaining that something was wrong with the stays, so that the French girl, who, it was plain to see, was ordered never to be out of the room when Martha was in it, did not understand it, though she speaks English almost as well as we do. I did not say a single word in reply, but I dare say you will guess, Arthur, that I began very soon to feel poorly, and so well did I play my part, that when the doctor came, I was ordered to bed directly. My husband was told that I had a great deal of fever, that I must continue to lie in bed, and take nothing but *tisane* and *épinards*. I continued to complain a great deal about my head and my back, and lay on, day after day, as patient as a saint, till my faithful Martha had contrived to put into my hands, under the bed clothes, a sheet of paper and a pencil. At another time, she contrived to say, 'Write what you wish as to the money, and I will see it written out properly. And for the signing, we must contrive that afterwards.' But poor Martha was never suffered to be with me at night, and I took care to seem too ill to know whether she was there or not. But, luckily, the woman that watched me chose to have a lamp in the room, and towards

the morning, when I saw she was in a pretty heavy doze, I managed to write the few words that I required, to express my meaning. They were only to say that I left every thing I had in the world to you, Arthur. But he was too sharp for me, and my poor Martha, upon some suspicion or other, was sent away without my ever signing the paper, or even seeing it again. I learnt afterwards from the man servant, when I got about again, that Martha was gone to England, poor thing, and that Monsieur Marathone himself went to the *Messagerie* with her, and saw her off, and so that clever plan came to nothing."

"I am not the less obliged to you, my dear aunt," replied Arthur, "but I trust that now that the only person who could have assisted you is gone, your husband has relaxed in the system of watchfulness that seems to have been so annoying to you?"

"Yes, Arthur, he has in a very great degree," replied the old lady. "But I suspect that it is only because he thinks that he is safe. And I suspect also, that he has only permitted us to have this long conversation in order to put me off my guard. When I came in here first, Arthur, I had no more idea of opening my heart to you, than I had of

flying, and I should not be at all surprised if he had overheard every word I have said. He has powers, Arthur, that are beyond the reach of common people to understand."

"I do not believe a word of it, my dear aunt, I don't believe he has any powers beyond being an abominable rogue, and I wish heartily he had heard what has passed, and that he would come here and say so."

"You know not what you are talking about, Arthur. But with all his supernatural power, I should not think it would be necessary for him to be actually watching at the door like a common vulgar spy. His manner of doing it, would I dare say be quite different. And it is time now, Arthur, that I should begin to obey his orders, and tell you his great secret. Sometimes, do you know, it frightens me so dreadfully when I only think of it, that I cannot bear to be left alone, but as it is only *his* servants that I have got now, I often sit trembling, and shaking, before I call one of them in, and it is that, more than my age, Arthur, that has changed my looks so, that I really don't seem to know myself when I look in the glass. But now then listen to me, and you will allow that I am not frightened for nothing."

Arthur smiled, and begged her to proceed, declaring that he began to be rather frightened himself, and was very anxious to be put out of suspense as to the nature of the communication she was about to make. But as this communication really was of a very interesting nature, it must not be made the end of a long chapter.

CHAPTER III.

“MONSIEUR MARATHONE,” began the aged lady in a low, but distinct voice, “Monsieur Marathone has found out, entirely by himself—by the extraordinary power of his own prodigious intellect, and without the slightest help from any body, how the whole world was made from the very beginning of time up to the present hour, and how it is to go on being made greater still for ever and for ever till the end. Now tell me, Arthur, is there not something awful in this?”

“Very awful indeed, my dear aunt,” replied Lexington, with more gravity than would have been possible perhaps, had the old lady been less nearly related to him. But the idea of her insanity recurred again so painfully that he began to feel very uneasy.

“Awful!” she resumed, “yes, Arthur, it is

awful; and that, not only because it must in any case be awful, you know, for one human being to find out quite by himself and with nobody in the world to help him, such a tremendous secret as this, but because the secret itself is such a very shocking one."

And here the poor old woman clasped her hands with a shuddering movement that seemed to run through her whole frame.

"Come, come, my dear aunt, do not let us talk any more of M. Marathone's great secret," said Arthur, rising, and anxious to get her back again from the contemplations of the visions which he believed to be disturbing her mind. "Suppose I go and look at some of your beautiful new buildings till dinner-time?"

"Beautiful new buildings! Oh, Arthur! Arthur!" she exclaimed. "When you come to know and understand all that I have got to tell you, how little will you care about beautiful new buildings or any thing else in comparison. Besides, Arthur," she added, with great earnestness, "I never should have been able to invite you here at all if it had not been for this. Don't talk of going out to look at buildings, pray, pray don't!"

Arthur was greatly puzzled. There was nothing

at all like madness in the manner in which his aunt now spoke to him, and believing that the best thing he could do in order to discover the real condition of her mind, was to listen to her patiently, let her talk what nonsense she would, he reseated himself and said:

“ I will not go out, my dear aunt, till I have heard every thing you wish to say. But tell me, in the first place, how your power of inviting me to visit you could depend upon M. Marathone's knowing how the world was made?”

“ That will be very easily explained, Arthur Lexington,” she replied, in an accent which certainly did not sound like madness. “ My husband, young as he was when I married him, was a wonderful scholar even then; and sometimes I have thought, poor young man! that perhaps he married me that he might get money to buy books, for really he seems to spend more that way than any other, though Martha used to tell me that he had got a strange sort of wild-looking barn of a place close by where they kill all the creatures for the butchers; and that the boy that he takes out with him, when he is going upon his experiments, tells strange tales sometimes, when they give him a cup of wine, about the things that

are going on up there, which my poor dear Martha said must all cost a great deal of money. The boy told Martha that his master spent hours and hours in making some of the dead beasts come to life again; and the butchers would not let him do that, you know, without paying handsomely for it, because it gave them all their work to do over again. And besides this place near the slaughter-house, he has got another, and that I have heard him talk of himself to his dear friend, Monsieur Lenoir, where, by his own account, he is very often employed in making living creatures of different kinds out of all sorts of old trumpery."

More confounded than ever by the unaccountable jargon of his venerable relative, Arthur again interrupted her by saying: "But how comes it, my dear aunt, that Monsicur Marathone should have confided all these extraordinary secrets to you, when it certainly does not seem that you have, on the whole been living very happily together?"

"That is easily explained, Arthur," she replied. "It is quite certain, that ever since I made my will he has been tormented by the fear that it was very likely I should make another (and you know, Arthur, that he was not very wrong there). However, he has taken very good care to prevent that,

and the way he has taken, which, to be sure, was the only rational way he could take, was to watch me late and early. He found out once, that I gave a small diamond ring to the maid whom he considered, I believe, as his best spy, and she was sent away for taking it; and then, he pretty nearly did all the day watching himself, till he got another girl, whom you will be sure to see before long, for it is seldom that he lets me be a moment without her. But in the interval between the two, that is, I mean, while he was watching me himself, he used to treat me exactly as if he thought I was deaf and dumb, for he used to have that nasty, dirty little chemist man, Lenoir, with him in this room from morning to night, sometimes, and I used to hear them settle between them how every thing in the whole world was made. As to Lenoir, I believe he did not think that I understood French, for if ever my husband did speak to me, it was in English, which is just the same to him as his own language, for he writes his books in it."

"M. Marathone certainly speaks our language like a native ; but why should he prefer writing in it ?" said Arthur.

"Because he is afraid of the archbishop," replied his aunt. "In England, he says, nobody cares

what people write, or what people read, so as a book does but sell; that, he says, is the only printing licence required there, and that is his reason for writing in English. As soon as M. Marathone found out that I had listened so much to their talk, he suddenly seemed to take a fancy into his head for letting me into all his secrets; though Heaven knows it was no pleasure to me, Arthur, but quite the contrary, for by degrees, as I learnt to understand more and more all the wonderful things he had found out, I really grew so afraid of him, that I thought I should lose my senses."

Arthur now began very strongly to suspect, that if his handsome uncle was not mad himself, he had been deliberately endeavouring to bring his wife into that condition, and to make her display her infirmity before him, with a view to prevent any of her future acts from having the power of invalidating what had been done by her in a more healthy state of mind.

This was a horrible surmise, but it really seemed more probable than any other which suggested itself.

From the violent manner in which his aunt's faithful old attendant had been dismissed, it was quite evident that Marathone had discovered both

the wish of his wife to make another will, and the assistance which old Martha had been willing to give her in doing so.

Such being the case, it was very natural that the heir under the will already executed, should be anxious to render it impossible that it should ever be superseded by any other, and the long *tête-à-tête* which Marathone had so evidently arranged between his aunt and himself, he being the very person to be benefited in case of a second will, was incomprehensible upon any other theory; especially as the subject on which he enjoined her to converse was precisely that which was sure to bring under his observation the diseased state of her intellect.

Lexington was so shocked at the idea of such detestable cruelty and fraud, that for some minutes after it had suggested itself, he sat in silent meditation upon what it would be his duty to do under the circumstances. There was such a mixture of absurdity in the whole affair, that he feared it would be impossible to obtain the assistance of legal authority in releasing his poor silly relative from her detestable thralldom; yet there seemed little chance of his being able to rescue her without it.

At length his aunt interrupted his reverie, by saying, " You don't seem to pay much attention to

any thing I have said to you, nephew; or perhaps you don't believe my wonderful stories?"

There was something extremely perplexing in the air of perfect sanity with which the old lady spoke at one moment, contrasted with her words and manner at another. Nothing could be less like madness than what she now uttered, and Lexington began to blame himself for having so lightly adopted an idea so terrible.

"My judgment," thought he, "must be as infirm as her own, or I should not find such difficulty in making up my mind upon the subject." And then, determined to lead her to talk further on the theme of her husband's extraordinary studies, he said, "It is not disbelief, my dear aunt, but astonishment, that has kept me silent. You cannot, surely, wonder at that."

"No, my dear, I do not wonder at it at all," she replied; "but you have heard nothing yet, Arthur, positively nothing. And really there are some of the things that I am almost ashamed to repeat; but yet I want you to know all, and every thing about it, that you may understand why it is that I have felt my spirits so strongly affected. I care for nothing now, Arthur, that I used to care about. All my nice dresses seem quite ridiculous to me

now, when I remember that I am neither more nor less than the great great grand-daughter, perhaps, of a monkey."

Poor Lexington, felt as if his common sense and his judgment were positively melting, and giving way under him, as he listened. Not King Solomon himself, in his very best days, could have worn an aspect of more perfect propriety and good sense, than did Madame Marathone, at the commencement of her last speech. But what was he to think of the conclusion of it? Again he was in danger of falling into a reverie, but he roused himself from it, and said,

"You should remember, my dear aunt, that although M. Marathone's theories are familiar to you, they are quite new to me, and that therefore, it is necessary, before I can fully understand them, that you should enter a little at length into the subject, and endeavour to explain to me as plainly as you can, what it all means."

"Nothing can be more reasonable," replied the old lady. "I will begin at the very beginning, and I feel quite capable of doing it, because Monsieur Lenoir has often told me that I appeared to understand the subject quite as well as M. Marathone did himself. The first thing that is to be done, my

dear Arthur, in studying this wonderful system is, I am sorry to say it, to put your Bible upon the shelf, and to forget as fast as you can, every word that is in it."

Arthur winced, and again all his worst fears came over him—but resolute to hear her to the end, he said nothing.

"Ay! I see it galls you, Arthur, and so it did me at first. But it is quite wonderful how soon one gets not to mind it. But indeed, my dear, it does appear quite certain that the person they call Moses, did not know at all what he was talking about, and as to all that extraordinary multitude of grave dunces (Marathone calls all the people dunces who believe in the Bible), as to all the multitude of people who have been thought throughout all ages to be the wiser the more they knew, and the more perfectly they believed the Bible, Marathone says, they are not worthy the trouble it would give to contradict them. Well, my dear, instead of attending to Moses, you must please to remember, that at first setting out, a great deal before the time that poor Moses pretends to talk about, the whole world was crammed full of fire and water that was mixed up together into a sort of a mist. Marathone never told me who mixed it, and I never thought of ask-

ing him, but I will, one of these days. However, Arthur, there was something or other, I don't exactly recollect what, that began rolling, and rolling, till at last it fell all to pieces, which was quite natural, considering the rate at which it went. I never can remember numbers, however, Marathone says, that the things did twirl round very fast indeed. Well, my dear, and then all the broken bits turned into a great many worlds like this world that we live in, and Marathone tells me, that he dares to say that they are all a good deal alike. Then the next thing that happened was the going and coming of the water, backwards and forwards, not like the Deluge you know; Marathone says that is all stuff; but now the great curiosity of all begins, for Marathone says, that somehow or other, I don't exactly remember all the particulars, but somehow or other by means of electricity and all that sort of thing, there began to be lots of little fishes. Marathone says, they were very shabby scrubby little fishes at first, but that every fish had a child that was a great deal better looking and cleverer than itself. At some particular time, I don't exactly remember when, the electricity did not go on any more in that particular way, because the creatures began to have fathers and mothers, but the most

extraordinary thing (excepting one) is, that when the fishes married, they had rats for children, and when the rats married, they had birds, or else the birds came first, and they were confined with rats, and then the rats had cats, I believe, and the cats had dogs, and the dogs monkeys, and the monkeys men and women. No, not men and women, Marathone says, that no men and women are ever made men and women, out and out, at first, but a great many other things before they are born. I do assure you, Arthur, it made my blood run cold when he told me that only a few months before I was born I was a fish first, and afterwards a reptile! Is it not enough to make one shudder?"

"But why, my dearest aunt!" cried Arthur, more than ever uncertain whether to believe her sane or insane, "why do you listen to such nonsense? Why should you suppose that because Monsieur Marathone says it, there must be any truth in such wild absurdity?"

"I don't wonder, Arthur, at your asking such a question. It is the most natural thing in the world that you should ask it, and all that I can answer is, LISTEN TO HIM; just listen to him, Arthur, and then see if you can help believing him. I know that I was not brought up to understand all the sciences, as

young ladies are now, but my dear brother, your father, was a very clever man, and so was your grandfather, Arthur, and I was not left so ignorant as not to know that when clever men turn their backs upon all the frivolity and nonsense of the world, and give themselves up altogether to the study of TRUTH, as Monsieur Marathone has done, that it is a work of great folly, if not of downright wickedness, not to believe them. I quite remember, Arthur," continued the old lady, after a moment's pause, "I quite well remember hearing my father say, that those who had not studied natural science, must suffer themselves to be led like blind men by those who had, and as I never have studied natural science, and Monsieur Marathone has, I should think it quite rashness and folly if I took upon me to contradict what he so solemnly assures me is true; and it is not only to me, or else I might have thought, perhaps, that he was laughing at me; but he says the very same things to every body else, for he often gives very pretty dinners to any scientific people he happens to make acquaintance with; he does not mind what country they are of, for he speaks almost all languages, but when he gets half-a-dozen together, mixed up of English, French, and German, they always speak French, and I understand

the conversation too, as his never choosing to lose sight of me, you know, has given me great opportunities of knowing what he says to people almost as learned as himself."

"And do they listen to him as docilely as you do, aunt?" said Arthur, smiling.

"Yes, that they do, Arthur, and many of them really seem to look about them as if they had never heard the truth before since the hour they were born. Then how can I pretend to set up my judgment against them?"

"And you really believe then, aunt," returned Arthur, looking as grave as he could, "you really believe that at one period since you came into existence, you were a fish, and at another a reptile?"

"Yes, Arthur, I do believe it," replied the old lady, very solemnly, "and that is not all, by any means, for I believe that I was a great many other things besides, and that just the last thing before I was a woman I was a monkey. I don't much wonder to see you laugh, Arthur, for it is enough to make any body laugh who has not heard Monsieur Marathone explain it all."

"And do all the scientific gentlemen who come to dine with Monsieur Marathone, do they all be-

lieve that they have been fishes, rats, and reptiles?" demanded Arthur.

"You put them in wrong order, dear nephew," replied Madame Marathone, with a good deal of dignity, "but all Monsieur Marathone's scientific friends not only believe, but *know* that they have all been fish, reptiles, birds, rats, and monkeys, before they were men; and they are all aware, as every good anatomist must be, he says, that Lord Monboddo was quite right about the tails."

One might have thought that all this, uttered as it was with the most perfect matter-of-fact gravity, might have sufficed Mr. Lexington, by way of experiment, on the condition of his aunt's intellects; but it was not so. He knew (with all his respect for her) that she was but a silly old woman, and remembering how proverbially easy it is to gull this class of persons, he determined to give her the benefit of all the doubt which this consideration suggested, and not only to converse with her a little further, but to find out, if possible, by examining M. Marathone himself, what the origin of these distracted delusions might be.

"Well but, my dear aunt," he resumed, "why should all this make you look about the room with such an appearance of terror as I remarked at

the beginning of our conversation? What was it you expected to find in your work-box? or to see flying about the ceiling?"

These questions seemed likely, as Arthur thought, to explain the real state of his aunt's mind, better than any of the preceding discussions, for the nervous trembling of the features and limbs, which he had before remarked, returned, and her pale cheeks became paler still as she replied:

" Ah! my dear nephew! there you come to what is the most terrible of all! I have quite made up my mind about the tail, and the reptiles, and the rats, and all the rest, and really now I care very little about it, for I think to myself that if all other people have got tails, and if they have all been fishes, and rats, and all the rest of it, I ought not to mind so much for myself as to make me uncomfortable, and I really have got not to care much about it. But if you would give me the whole world, I can't help caring about that other thing that he has told me of, because it does seem to me to be so very shocking!"

" But what is it, aunt? You must not leave the work of instruction half done. What is that other thing?" said Arthur.

" No, Arthur!" replied the old lady, solemnly, " I will not leave the work half done. Your father

was a good Christian, Arthur, and so was his father before him, and as I hope and believe, you are a good Christian too; and if you are, you will feel as much shocked as I did at being told that the gift of life, which the Almighty breathes with the immortal soul into the nostrils of every human being that he sends into the world, may be had by a curious contrivance, without any help at all from God. Now it seems to me, Arthur, that there is something very shocking in this; and I don't like it at all."

"But I suspect, my dear aunt," replied Arthur, gently, and at length reluctantly making up his mind to believe that his unfortunate relative was indeed insane, "I suspect that you must have misinterpreted what you have heard these scientific gentlemen say. Depend upon it you did not understand them rightly. No person could be found seriously to utter such blasphemous nonsense as you have now spoken to me."

"You are wrong, nephew, in giving me credit for the blasphemy," said the old lady, with every appearance of being again in her right mind; "I will not indeed say that Monsieur Marathone declared in so many words that he could go into his laboratory, and bring out a regiment of men of his own making. I never meant to say that. But it comes, you know,

exactly to the same thing in the end, if he tells us that he can go into his laboratory, and make little living creatures of some sort or other; for as all animals, from the very meanest, go on improving and improving, as they breed, from generation to generation, till at last human beings are produced, it comes exactly to the same thing, doesn't it? For how can it help coming to the same thing? Suppose it is all true that he says about his being able to make live creatures, and about all live creatures going on improving from generation to generation till they come to be men, isn't it just the same thing as if he said he could make men at once?"

The unfortunate Lexington was again bewildered in doubt; for he did not remember any instance of an insane person's inventing theories, and then demonstrating their absurdity. But he had still to learn why it was that the unfortunate old lady had manifested so much terror when they were first left alone, and he again asked her to explain this.

"Why, don't you see, nephew," she replied, "don't you see that it could not be half so difficult for a man like Monsieur Marathone to turn himself back again into a bird, or a mouse, or even a fly, as to give life to the rubbish that he keeps down at his laboratory? Don't you see this?"

"I should not think it would," returned Arthur, smiling.

"Well then, my dear, that will make you understand why it was that I looked frightened. From the very first moment that he told me that I might invite you over, and take the first opportunity after you came of having a long talk with you about his book, from that very moment, Arthur, I began to suspect that he wanted to put me off my guard. And when I set about thinking what was the most likely way he would take to do it, it struck me at once that he must, most likely, have the power of turning himself back again into some of the little creatures that may be hid anywhere. But I hope I was wrong, Arthur—I hope I was. And now that I have you with me, I seem to have more courage, for I don't think, even if he had overheard every word about old Martha, and the will, and all, he would venture to do any thing very bad to me, now I have got you. I am sure you would not let him, Arthur, would you?"

"Assuredly I would not," he replied; "and though I feel quite sure, my dear aunt, that Monsieur Marathone went out of the house when he left us, and that he has not overheard any thing we have said, I doubt whether I shall think it right to leave

you without some faithful attendant whom I could trust, to let me know, from time to time, how you go on. I should be very glad to have your Martha back again, but I suppose you have no means of sending to her?"

"I certainly do not think I should be suffered to write to her," replied Madame Marathone, "for it would be quite impossible for me, now she is gone, to convey a letter to the post. Neither have I any hope, Arthur, that he would ever suffer her to be with me again. But I know well enough the direction that would always be sure to find her in London."

"Then give it to me immediately," said Arthur, eagerly. "Monsieur Marathone may perhaps not be willing to repeat this experiment of a *tête-à-tête* between us; and it is possible that you may not have another opportunity."

Pen, ink, and paper were lying upon the table; and Arthur, having carefully written the direction of Martha Squabs, from his aunt's dictation, rose to take his leave, promising, however, to avail himself of the invitation he had received from M. Marathone, to join them at dinner at six o'clock.

His poor aunt seemed to see him depart with alarm as well as regret.

“I cannot help doubting,” she said, “if he will ever let me see you again. He has had some motive, I am sure, for letting me send for you. But it is very, very unlikely, my poor Arthur, that he will give us such an opportunity as this again. And, now I think of it, my dear, it would have been a great deal better for me to have occupied the time we have been together in making another will, and signing it in your presence, instead of obeying his orders, and telling you all that long history about his discoveries.”

“Its being signed in my presence, by dear aunt, would effectually prevent the possibility of its ever being useful to me; and this, you may depend upon it, Monsieur Marathone knows as well as I do. He might leave us together till doomsday, without turning himself into a mouse to watch us, if all he feared was your making a will in my favour.”

“Nay, then, I cannot reasonably expect you to stay very long with me,” replied the poor old woman, with a sigh. “And as to his letting me have my Martha back again, you might as well expect him to burn the will he has got, before your eyes.”

“As to my remaining with you, my dear aunt,” replied Arthur, “we can neither of us expect, under

all the circumstances, that it would be permitted. I cannot suppose that Monsieur Marathone would greatly enjoy my society, but respecting your good Martha, I am not altogether without hope. However, we must not be too sanguine, for fear of disappointment. I must have a little conversation with my honoured uncle, and after that, perhaps, I shall be able to speak with more certainty."

"God bless you, my nephew!" said the pale, thin old woman, while tears started to her eyes. "It is a long time since I have seen the face of any human being who cared as much for me as you seem to do. Long and long, indeed, if I except poor Martha! And from her, perhaps, I had some right to look for kindness, but from you, Arthur—"

"You are my dear father's sister," said Lexington, interrupting her, "and that is a claim upon me that I never will refuse to answer. Not to mention, my dear lady, that you would have done much for me if you could. But let it be a consolation to us both upon finding this impossible, that existing circumstances would render any thing you could now do in my favour of very little advantage to me. But enough of this. Without the very slightest reference to your will, there is in your position quite enough to interest any man who is not perfectly a brute."

And then they parted, the old lady being greatly comforted by the interview; and the young man, after greater vacillation of opinion than had ever happened to him in his whole life before, inclined to think at last that all which he had most strongly believed, while it lasted, was precisely, of all his theories, the most likely to be wrong.

In short, he left Madame Marathone pretty thoroughly convinced that she was no more mad than the generality of old ladies may fairly be expected to be, who, at the age of threescore years and ten, place themselves in the power of a very particularly handsome young philosopher of twenty-five.

CHAPTER IV.

By the time this long conversation came to a conclusion, not more than two hours remained before that appointed for the philosopher's dinner, and those two hours were not spent by Lexington in looking at the beautiful buildings he had talked of, but in pacing up and down the gardens of the Tuileries, that he might meditate at leisure on what it was possible he could do to benefit his unfortunate aunt.

Had the alteration which she was so anxious to make in her will, concerned any individual living but himself, he would have felt no difficulty in at once removing her from the power of her worthless husband, and giving her a home under his own protection for the rest of her days.

But the idea of running away with her for the purpose of having her present will superseded by

another, in his favour, was not to be thought of. And yet to leave her completely in the power of M. Marathone, was equally repugnant to his feelings. It was in vain, however, that he walked, and thought; no bright idea flashed upon him that could light him out of his difficulties; and at last he went home to his lodgings to dress for his engagement, without having at all decided how he ought to behave to his host, or what it would be possible to do in order to assist his wretched hostess.

The only point on which he had come to a decision, was that he would not leave Paris without doing *something* to render her existence less wretched than it was at present; and could he have flattered himself that M. Marathone would favour him with a *tête-à-tête* in the course of the evening, he would have felt well-contented to wait for the result of that, before he attempted to make up his mind on the subject; but he dared not hope for this, and he mounted the stairs to the philosopher's elegant abode, with no expectation of any more important result from his visit, than discovering how his estimable uncle would receive his request for a private interview with him on the morrow.

To his agreeable surprise, however, he found that

he was to dine *en tiers* with M. and Madame Marathone; and rather than fail in making his host comprehend the view he had taken of his conduct towards his aunt, he determined himself to request that she would leave the room, as soon as the servants should have withdrawn.

But here again he was agreeably surprised, for they had not been seated ten minutes at table, before M. Marathone said, "I hope, my dear nephew, that you have no very early engagement which will oblige you to leave us before I have had the pleasure of conversing with you for an hour? Your excellent aunt usually indulges in a short repose after dinner, and during that time it would give me particular satisfaction to converse with you alone."

Lexington assured him that he had no engagement which would interfere with his compliance with a request that was so agreeable to him; and then the dinner proceeded in the most polite and friendly manner possible.

M. Marathone was superlatively agreeable; he talked well, fluently, and with great animation. To his aged wife he was exceedingly attentive, treating her, however, rather more like a spoiled child than a companion, yet appearing to take the most scr-

pulous care of her diet, himself mixing the wine and water that was handed to her, and seeming while selecting the most delicate morsels for her plate to withdraw carefully whatever might be supposed unfit for an invalid.

At length the very *récherché* little repast was concluded, and M. Marathone rising, presented his arm with the greatest appearance of assiduous tenderness to his wife, saying as he pointed to one door, while he led her towards another, "That is the drawing-room, Mr. Lexington. If you will have the goodness to enter there I will come to you immediately. And you, dear friend," turning to his wife, "you will retire to your own chamber for an hour or so, and I hope you will enjoy a little quiet sleep."

Arthur passed through the door indicated, and found himself in a larger and more splendid room than he had yet seen, and there his host almost immediately joined him.

"This is very kind of you, my dear Lexington. I was afraid you might have some project, operatic or theatrical, which might have interfered with our having a little quiet conversation this evening," said he, as he placed himself *vis à vis* to his guest, who had established himself upon a sofa, "and I

should have regretted this, as I think there should be no further delay in comparing our notes together concerning the situation of your unfortunate aunt. You have had this morning, I think, a fair opportunity, which I took care should not be interfered with by the presence of any third person, you have had a perfectly fair opportunity of judging for yourself respecting her state of mind. I am afraid, my dear Lexington," continued Monsieur Marathone, after a moment's pause, "I am sadly afraid you can give me but one answer."

"My opinion of my aunt's state of mind," replied Arthur, quietly, "is that considering her age and infirmities, she has preserved a cooler judgment, and more sound and just views upon all the subjects which have so strangely been brought before her, than I could have expected. I have never been accustomed to look upon my aunt as a strong-minded woman, but I really think her so now."

"Surely, Mr. Lexington," exclaimed Monsieur Marathone, with a frown, "surely, sir, this is not a moment in which to use the figure of speech called irony. My unhappy wife, sir, is your near relation."

"I know it, Monsieur Marathone," replied Ar-

thur, with quiet sternness, "and I shall remain near her long enough to convince you, that an English woman who has a near relation, is also likely to have a firm protector."

"A protector, Mr. Lexington? I understand not the meaning of your words. While I live, my wife can never want a protector," returned the Frenchman, raising his handsome eyes to the face of Arthur, and looking at him very much as if he expected that he would run away from the terrific glance, like a whipt child.

The penetrating quietness of the eye that he saw fixed upon his in return, seemed, however, to produce a change in his view of the business in hand, for his tone was entirely altered as he said:

"We are both of us nearly connected with the unfortunate lady, Mr. Lexington, and we should both be guilty of great folly if we suffered either temper, or prejudice of any kind, to mix in the discussion, which it is so greatly to be desired that we should hold concerning her. Of my kind and honourable intentions concerning your aunt, I have given the best proof by sending for you; for, that the doing so was my act, I presume you cannot entertain any doubt, as you are probably aware that the poor lady is not in a condition to be permitted

in any way to act for herself. That you are aware what that condition is, I must also presume to be beyond the reach of doubt; and the only way in which I can interpret your present strange demeanour, is, by supposing that you think I have been wrong in retaining her under domestic *surveillance* so long, instead of placing her in an asylum for lunatics. Perhaps you are right, Mr. Lexington, and it was precisely to discuss this question that I wished to see you."

"It is a question, sir, which I am perfectly willing to discuss," replied Arthur; "and the more so, as it admits of various modes of settlement. The question does not, in my opinion, lie only between the two alternatives you have suggested. There is at least one other, which I think may be more desirable than either. By domestic *surveillance*, I presume you mean that which she can receive in her own house?"

"Precisely so," replied M. Marathone.

"Then I certainly am of opinion, that there are at present many objections to it," replied Lexington.

"Well, sir, I am amenable to reason. I have already said, that if such were your opinion, I should perhaps agree with you in it."

“But I have further to say, Monsieur Marathone, that if I consider the *surveillance* to which she is subjected in her own house objectionable, I should disapprove still more, if it be possible, that of a lunatic asylum.”

“Good Heaven, sir! then what would you do with her?” replied the young husband, again having recourse to his magnificent frown. “You surely do not mean to tell me that you doubt her being insane?”

“What proof do you think she shows of it?” demanded Arthur.

“Has she said nothing to you respecting the wild notions that have taken possession of her?” returned Marathone.

“Nothing, I believe,” replied Arthur, gravely, “but what she has received as doctrine from you.”

“Is it possible, sir, that you can confound the noble theories which are to be found in the work I did myself the honour to mention to you, with the raving fancies of your maniac aunt?”

“It is certainly possible, Monsieur Marathone,” replied Arthur, “that her version may be a little more simply worded than your own; but I am quite convinced, sir, that what she has been repeating to me, she received from you. Whether she

received it *all*, during the discussions between yourself, and your friend M. Lenoir (when your fear of losing sight of her induced you to enforce her presence during your meetings), or whether a part of it may not have been instilled by you, in private, for the purpose of preparing her mind for such an investigation, and such a display, as you purposed should take place, I am not quite sure. But in either case the effect has not been what you seem to suppose. My aunt has not lost her reason during the process."

The embarrassed air, and heightened complexion of M. Marathone, as he listened to these words, convinced Arthur, that he had in no way mistaken the iniquitous purpose of his handsome uncle, nor was he greatly disposed to acquit him of any part of the charge he had made against him, from his saying (after meditating as it seemed for a moment upon how he might best answer this attack),

"Then if I understand you rightly, Mr. Arthur Lexington, you mean to say that the noble theory to which I have devoted my best faculties, was invented by me solely for the purpose of mystifying the intellects of an old woman?"

"Upon my word, sir," he replied, "as far as I at

present comprehend the nature of your efforts, this object seems rather more reasonable than any other I can trace, and quite as respectable as any other I can imagine. But you must permit me to wave this part of the discussion altogether. It is not, and it cannot be, of the slightest importance to me to know whether you were in earnest, or only making believe, as the children say, when you occupied yourself in stating your conviction, that you were the lineal descendant of a reptile; the only point in the affair which concerns me, or in which I feel the slightest interest, is that which touches upon your conduct past, present, and future, towards your wife."

"Well, sir!" said Marathone, throwing aside the sort of gentlemanly demeanour which he had hitherto maintained, and adopting, without mitigation or disguise, the tone and manner of a bully, "Well, sir, and what have you to do, if you please, with my conduct, past, present, and future?"

"Nothing, M. Marathone, nothing in the world, save, as I said before, where it touches my aunt; and on this point if you will give me leave, I am quite ready to explain myself. I am aware that you have in your possession a will, made by my aunt, in which she has left her property to you.

This will is, I have no doubt, properly and fully executed, and if no subsequent will is made by her, you will, beyond all doubt, become entitled at her death to the whole of her large fortune. Your great object, at present, therefore, is to prevent her making a subsequent will, and it is evident to me that, having become weary of the troublesome task of incessantly watching her, you have determined to prove her insane, for the purpose of rendering any future will, if she should sufficiently escape your vigilance to make one, valueless. Nothing, M. Marathone, would be more easy than for me to prove, by her own testimony, by that of her late servant, Martha Squabs, and by my own deposition on oath concerning what you have yourself said to me respecting her state of mind, that such is your purpose, and this being proved, nothing would be more easy for me, as her next of kin, than to cause myself to be constituted her guardian. But I am not disposed to enrich myself, or to punish you, in this manner. I will not, if I can possibly help it, run away with my aunt, believing, that if I do so, she will immediately reward me by making me her heir instead of you. It is evident, from her having made the will now in your possession, that you have not always used her so cruelly as you have

done of late; it is evident that, even since her marriage, she has been strongly attached to you, and, however contrary to my interest such an attachment has been, I should not feel any right to interfere with the disposition of her property, over which, both by law and equity, she had the most entire control, were your relative position to each other to be restored to what it was when that will was made. Trust me, Monsieur Marathone, your best security against the danger you fear would be found by reviving in her mind the feelings of affection, which would render her robbing you of the benefit of that will by her own inclination impossible. Let me have reason to believe that this is the case, and you shall have no further cause to lament the unlucky blunder which led you to think that you should be able to convince me of her insanity, by leading her to converse on a subject, by the help of which you have certainly succeeded in puzzling her judgment, though you have failed in shaking her reason."

"I really am greatly at a loss, Mr. Lexington, to comprehend exactly what you mean," returned M. Marathone, evidently inclined to avoid a quarrel with his beloved nephew, if possible. "But if you

will point out, sir, any mode of treatment by which I can make your excellent aunt more comfortable than she is at present, I am perfectly ready to pledge my word to you that it shall be adopted."

"There is at least one point upon which I should lay great stress—the immediate return of her old servant, Martha Squabs," said Arthur.

Monsieur Marathone winced at this very perceptibly, yet, nevertheless, he replied with the utmost gentleness, that the condition should immediately be complied with if they should be fortunate enough to discover where the old woman had gone.

"True!" said Arthur, "her return must, of course, depend upon our finding her, but rely upon it, M. Marathone, you will have no reason to fear her influence if your own be fairly used to revive the affection of my poor aunt. She still thinks you the most charming man in the world," continued Arthur, with a smile, "and depend upon it you have only to make her feel that you are still disposed to be as kind to her as formerly, in order to make her willing to leave you a dozen fortunes if she had them."

"Well, Lexington, I may have been mistaken, I may have been wrong," returned M. Marathone,

all his former grace of manner restored. "Let me, however, implore you to believe that the line of conduct you now point out to me will be a thousand times more agreeable to my feelings than that which I was induced to adopt when under the persuasion that she was deranged. If you can discover old Martha, I shall be perfectly willing to let her return, and I shall be most truly thankful to you if I find that you have been right in supposing that there is nothing essentially wrong in my poor wife's head."

"Essentially wrong?" repeated Lexington, with a smile that he could not suppress. "I confess I think there is something very essentially wrong in her natural philosophy. But I dare say, Monsieur Marathone, you will permit that to correct itself, which process, I confess, I think will be best assisted by your avoiding for the future, in her presence, all discussions leading to the development of your sublime philosophy."

"Ah!" ejaculated Monsieur Marathone in reply, "I can conceive that it may be possible. Mr. Lexington, I will be cautious. Trust to my discretion; I will for the future be very cautious."

Lexington then took his leave, tolerably well satisfied that his poor, suffering old aunt would be permitted to pass the short period of existence

which remained to her in peace; but quite determined, nevertheless, not to lose sight of her till he had secured this peace by some guarantee which he should think might be more securely relied upon than that of his handsome uncle.

CHAPTER V.

HIS intercourse with his aunt was after this permitted to continue without any apparent watchfulness on the part of M. Marathone, that gentleman being fully aware, as Arthur had told his frightened wife, that any will made by her in favour of her nephew, as long as the said nephew should be notoriously aiding and abetting the same, would bring with it no danger whatever.

The first use which Lexington made of this unrestrained communication was to place before her as plainly as he could the position in which she stood, and the necessity there was to remove from her young husband's mind all anxiety respecting the ultimate validity of the will he possessed.

He earnestly begged her on no account to hazard her safety or her comfort by making efforts which might so easily be rendered vain by Marathone,

and he concluded by assuring her that he did not intend to leave Paris till he saw her faithful Martha again in attendance upon her.

This promise evidently gave the old lady much greater satisfaction than any thing else he had said to her, and very fervent was the blessing she bestowed upon him in return.

No unnecessary delay took place in the efforts made by Arthur to perform this promise, but nevertheless, several weeks elapsed before Martha Squabs was found, and a further interval before she arrived at Paris. At length, however, the difficulties were all conquered and this desired object achieved, and then it was by a fortunate coincidence in time, that the following letter reached the hands of Arthur, which had it arrived before, might have tended a little to disturb the patient good management by which the arrangement had been brought to perfection.

“ Dear Lexington—I promised to send you all the news of the country, and by this time, I presume, you have set me down for one of those who attach little or no meaning to such kind-sounding phrases. I am positively shocked when I recollect how long it is since I gave that promise, and how completely I have failed to redeem it.

“ The fact is, or at any rate one fact is, that I have had a pretty severe fit of the gout, and while this sort of affliction is upon me, I make it a rule to plague myself with no accounts, and to send my pen and ink away to the furthest extremity of my mansion. And then I deliver myself over to flannel and water-gruel, till the fiend departs, consoling myself the while with all the novels that have been published since my last fit.

“ This I hope will be accepted as an apology for time past. As for time present, I am better, but, nevertheless, have found it necessary to pack myself up for the winter. Almost all our neighbours have forsaken poor little Compton and its adjacent mansions for the busier haunts of men, and even my valuable geological friend, Mr. Vidal, has run away like the rest. But he has decidedly a much better excuse for betaking himself to the great Babylon than most people, for he is engaged there in making preparations for a very splendid marriage. By the way, it just occurs to me that if none of your neighbours have been better correspondents than myself, you have yet to learn the great and rather surprising changes which have taken place in our circle since you left us. It was a great comfort to me, when I no longer had you to make much of

me, my dear Arthur, to get that exceedingly pleasant fellow, and devoted geologist, Vidal, to come and stay here, though, to be sure, as far as scientific conversation went, I might as well have had Miss Elizabeth Jenkins with me; however, I was not quite selfish enough to quarrel with the young man for that, as it soon came out that the fortunate youth was going to be married. But who do you suppose is to be the bride? You might take a month to guess, and yet chance to be wrong at last. I forget whether it was before or after you went that there was a notion throughout the neighbourhood that he was to marry our beauty of beauties, Clara Maynard; however, there certainly was such a report, but whoever invented it made a precious blunder, for the real lady is no less a personage than Mary Clementson, the pretty little heiress of Dalbury? We don't any of us, I believe, know much about this Mr. Theodore Vidal, excepting that he is a very clever, gentlemanlike, pleasant fellow. But let him be who he will, this is a great match. The estate is one of the finest in the country; and instead of its being encumbered in any way, it is the squire who would be encumbered by the rents arising from it, if he had not the convenience of the Bank of England to deposit his

superfluities in, for he has never spent his income, and of late years not more than the half of it, and this is the reason, perhaps, why he has chosen a son-in-law who may be able to help him, for I cannot find that any body has ever heard of Mr. Vidal's estates. However, that is nothing to me. The young man is, I suspect, a very profound geologist, for I have sometimes thought he kept back because he fancied I might feel hurt if he displayed how much more he knew about the matter than I did. But be this as it may, the match is a great match for him. The whole party are to leave the country for London during the winter—Randals, Monktons, and Springfields will desert us of course, and what will become of your old friend if you do not come back to look after him, I know not. But in any case he will subscribe himself,

“ Sincerely and affectionately yours,

“ JOHN NORMAN.”

The effect produced on the feelings of Arthur Lexington by this letter were such as repeatedly to elicit from his own lips the exclamation, “ I am a fool !” It certainly did seem very absurd that a man, who for years had so successfully resisted an affection, as not only to keep it a secret from its object, but to have schooled himself into the firm

belief that nothing would ever induce him to disclose it, it certainly was very absurd to hear him bless Heaven for what did not appear in the least likely to benefit him. And that he was himself of this opinion, the above cited exclamation will show.

But neither the exclamation, nor the sage conviction which led to it, had power to destroy, or even to check the exceeding great happiness which seemed to diffuse itself over the whole being of Arthur. He had found, and, as he feared, too late, the prodigiously great difference between living near a beloved object, who, if she may not be his, at least seems not likely to be soon another's, and the having to contemplate her as an affianced wife.

He had now known this lost state, and found the torture of it almost too great to bear. And reasonably, or not reasonably, the fact was, that on hearing of Mr. Vidal's approaching marriage with Miss Clementson, he felt considerably happier than he had ever done in his whole life before.

Perhaps at last he had come to the persuasion, that in case Clara could be brought to value him again, as much as she had once seemed to do, there would be greater wisdom in learning to live economically together on a small income, than in studying how to live asunder.

Did any shadow of regret cross his mind as he remembered how well, and how effectually he had exerted himself to prevent the possibility of his aunt altering her will in his favour?

No. Most positively NO. His spirit was now as light, as elastic, as joyous, as hope could make it, and it would *not* have been so with him, had there been any thing on his conscience to weigh it down.

Nevertheless, he certainly did feel inclined to hasten through all the business which there still remained to do, as speedily as possible. Yet nothing was neglected either, that could make his good work complete. It would be difficult to say whether mistress, or maid, was most delighted by the reunion he had effected between them, and whatever might be passing in the hidden recesses of M. Marathone's mind, he too declared himself *enchanté*, at once again seeing his excellent lady look so well pleased.

Several conversations took place between the husband, the nephew, and the restored Abigail, upon the delicate state of the old lady's health, and of the best mode of treatment for the weakness which seemed rapidly increasing on her; but no allusion was made by either, to the exploded notion of her insanity, any more than if no such notion had ever existed.

Arthur was on the whole well-contented with the promises, and with the general manner of his handsome uncle, during this discussion, but not so the venerable Martha Squabs.

Arthur had not returned to his lodgings for the purpose of completing the preparations for his departure above an hour, when Martha made her appearance, and begged leave to speak to him for "half a moment."

Having placed her in his easiest chair, he begged her with some alarm to explain the cause of her visit, which she did by saying:

"You don't know our fine Monsieur Marathone so well as I do, Mr. Arthur."

"What do you mean, Martha?" cried Lexington, hastily. "There is no new treachery, is there?"

"There is nothing that has broke out as yet," replied Martha, knitting her brows, "but I shall not like to be left altogether to his mercy, sir, when you have left Paris."

"What is it you fear?" said Lexington, the terror of a prolonged absence from Compton making him turn pale.

"I do not know what I fear," she replied. "All I can say to you, sir, is, that I do not think Monsieur Marathone is to be trusted."

“What then do you propose, my good Martha?” returned Arthur, literally trembling with alarm lest she should propose his remaining. “It will be very inconvenient to me if I am obliged to continue any longer in Paris.”

“And it would go against me, sir,” replied the worthy woman, “to ask you to do it. Such kindness, such generous goodness as you have shown ought not to be imposed upon. All that is necessary for you to do, sir, before you leave Paris is to state to the police that there is reason for putting Monsieur Marathone under their surveillance, and that I am the person whom you have charged with the task of watching that he practises no mischief against his wife. When you have done this, and put me in communication with the officer, quietly mention to M. Marathone what you have done, in order to assure yourself during your absence of the safety of your aunt, and then you may depart as soon as you please.”

Arthur lost not a moment in obeying her.

M. Marathone coloured slightly when told of it: but uttered not a word of remonstrance.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE these scenes were passing round the self-banished Arthur Lexington, and while he was looking towards the conclusion of them, and to the hope of soon quitting the ever-brilliant movement of Paris, for the quiet little town of Compton, with the sort of longing which a man, seated in the pit of Le Grand Opera, during a highly drummed and trumpeted performance, and suffering the while from an atrocious headach, may look back to the profound stillness, and soft pillows of his distant bed-room. While Arthur was thus longing for Compton, Compton and its neighbourhood seemed to be growing weary of itself.

Never, perhaps, did any gentleman, so perfectly at liberty to do what he liked, as was Mr. Clementson, contrive to do so many important things that he did not like at all, as he did. And what

rendered this the more provoking to the worthy squire, as he reflected upon it, was, that he had not only possessed the power, but was, at all times and at all seasons, fully conscious that he did so, and very steadfastly determined to exercise it too, firmly convinced, poor man ! that nobody could understand his concerns, and those of his daughter Mary, so well as himself.

But if ever there was a human being suffering under the misfortune of being "left to himself," it was the squire of Dalbury.

This favourite phrase of the audacious sect who expect a special intervention of Providence to direct their goings and doings, may be applied, without any such impiety, to him, for his misfortunes certainly arose from his trusting to his own discretion, of which he probably had as little as any sane individual in her majesty's dominions, and of which lamentable deficiency, moreover, he was wholly unconscious.

During pretty nearly every day of the month which followed Mr. Lexington's leaving Compton, in order to set off for Paris, the good squire had been growing less and less gay, less and less talkative, less and less satisfied with himself, and, in one word, less and less happy.

Poor dear man! He would have done vastly better had he married Miss Anne Jenkins, at the interval of two decent years after the death of his wife. The kind heart of that excellent spinster, joined to the keen eye possessed by pretty nearly every woman breathing, in such matters as those in which he had so egregiously blundered, would, ten to one, have saved him from all that he was now suffering. No self-reproaches on this score, however, were added to his other discomforts, for such a measure never had, and never could, have entered his head.

But what rendered his actual position the most deplorable was the impossibility in which he found himself of discovering any possible means of getting out of it. His two great unnamed, and, in fact, unnameable sources of unhappiness were, first, a very vague, but very strong suspicion that Mary was not so violently in love with Mr. Vidal as he had thought her to be; and, secondly, a conviction, not vague at all, that all his own fancied liking for that accomplished gentleman had vanished into something very nearly the reverse. The chief cause of this was, that Mr. Vidal never seemed to understand him when he was talking about Mary.

Unfortunate Mr. Clementson! How completely he had mistaken every one of the indications upon

which he had acted so promptly, so boldly, so decidedly !

Mary had loudly declared her admiration for Mr. Vidal, but it was only to mask her too great admiration for another.

Mary had avoided, as much as she well could, all intimate intercourse with her cousin; but it was only because she believed him to be attached to her humble friend, and to be beloved in return by her.

Mary had consented readily to marry Vidal; but it was only because she thought, in her young wisdom, that she should be more right in doing so (as her father said he was so very much attached to her) than if she lived single, in order that she might go on loving another man, who loved her not, and who was, moreover, likely to be soon the husband of her friend.

But of all these very serious and important facts, the squire of Dalbury was as ignorant as the child unborn; and yet, good man, he must be plotting and planning for the happiness of his darling; pluming himself, the while, upon his own superiority to every interested feeling, because he was willing to give his wealthy heiress to a man who, if he could not be said, in common phrase, not to be worth a shilling, was most certainly worth very

few, and of whom he knew positively nothing, but that all the fine gentlemen and ladies in the neighbourhood had thought proper to make themselves very intimate with him, because he was so "fascinating and agreeable!"

Unfortunate Mr. Clementson! and ill at ease and uncomfortable as he felt himself, he was, in fact, a thousand times more unfortunate than he was himself aware. For, if he had only left matters alone a little while, every thing would have come right, and he might truly have found himself one of the very happiest men alive.

It was lucky for him that he did not know this, for if he had, he must assuredly have gone mad, for he by no means bore very philosophically the comparatively trifling annoyances which now beset him, though, when compared to all the terrible mischief he had contrived to do, they were, in fact, nothing worth thinking about.

It was, however, in part, their nothingness which made him so exceedingly uncomfortable; had there been any thing tangibly wrong in Mr. Vidal's conduct, the affair would have been very speedily settled; or had he seen any positive reason for being sure that Mary did not like him so well as he had fancied she did, the drama would have been

happily concluded in a wonderfully short space of time; for in that case he would, without hesitating a moment, have frankly confessed the fact to Mr. Vidal, and offered him, by way of compensation for the breach of promise, such a sum of money (without the help of a jury) as that truly reasonable gentleman would decidedly have accepted, not only without difficulty, but with the very best grace imaginable.

But what *right* had Mr. Clementson to suppose that Mary was not as much in love with him as ever?

Did they not always dance together whenever dancing was going on?

Did they ever walk out without her taking his arm?

Did she not sing with him almost every evening in the week?

And when she rode, though she and her beautiful pony wanted no man at the bridle rein, did she ever chide him from her, when he drew near with the air of one whose occupation was to watch over her safety, at that moment and for ever? Could he deny any of this?

No, no, no, nothing of all this could be doubted. She never did any thing of the kind. And yet

her father had a notion that she did not laugh so much as she used to do.

But that might certainly be owing to the grave thoughts which would naturally arise from contemplating the approaching change in her condition. He fancied, too, that she was growing thin; and he even sent for Mr. Simmons, the apothecary; and the idea certainly did occur to him, that if that gentleman should say that Mary seemed to have something upon her mind which made her uneasy, he should be the happiest man alive.

But nothing like this was the result of Mr. Simmons' visit. On the contrary, he only said that he thought the young lady might perhaps have been dancing a little too much; but that when all the gay families went to town for the winter, and that Miss Clementson returned again to more regular hours, he dared to say that she would soon begin to look plump again. So that did not answer.

And then the ill-at-ease gentleman, after walking up and down his cloisters with his hands behind his back, for at least an hour, determined, that at his dressing-room *tête-à-tête* with his daughter on the following morning, he would, as broadly as he could do, without behaving dishonourably to Mr.

Vidal, question her roundly as to her present state of mind respecting that gentleman, in order to discover if she were quite as much in love with him as ever.

"No, no," said he to himself, as, his resolution being taken, he turned away from the quiet scene of his meditations, "No, no, I will not say a word about not liking him myself, for I cannot, in conscience say that he has done any thing to deserve it." And the good man felt a pang of conscience as he caught himself muttering between his teeth, "I wish he had."

On the following morning, he heard Mary's step approaching, and thought, as he listened, that he must know it by instinct, for that it did not sound as it used to do. She entered, however, as she had ever done, with the beaming look of warm affection, which seemed to have ripened into a rational knowledge of *why* she loved him, without losing an atom of the instinctive fondness of childhood.

But before repeating the short dialogue which passed between them, it must be observed that Mary had been tormenting herself a good deal of late, by observing, that although more letters came to her father from her cousin Richard, than might have been expected, none of them had ever been shown to her.

Now she certainly would have liked to see these letters; but it was not from thinking of the loss of any pleasure which she might have derived from reading them, that she felt annoyed; it was only because she thought there was but one way of accounting for their not being shown her.

“My father has discovered my wicked secret,” thought poor Mary, while her face and neck bore testimony to the shame with which such an idea inspired her. “Oh, what can I do more than I have done, to conquer the disgraceful weakness, and sink it in oblivion for ever?”

She certainly knew not what more to do; but she went to the morning interview, which was no longer one of the dearest and happiest portions of her existence, fully determined to take advantage of any opportunity it might afford for proving how particularly happy she felt at the prospects that were opening before her.

“My dearest Mary!” began the squire, in what he thought the least startling manner possible, “I don’t think that you look so gay, or so well as you used to do. You know, my darling, that you always used to tell me every thing that came into your head, and you must not leave that off, Mary, for it would break my heart. Tell me, then, dearest, are you quite, quite happy?”

"Yes, indeed, papa!" replied the greatly vexed girl, colouring violently. "What can have made you think the contrary?"

"Nothing, Mary; nothing in the world, my dear child. Only, you know, young people do sometimes change their minds, Mary; and young ladies," he added, endeavouring to look particularly gay, "have a privilege to do so. You know that, my dear, don't you?"

"It is a privilege of which I do not at all wish to avail myself, papa," she replied, in a tone of great decision.

"Oh, then that is all right, and as it should be, my love," returned the disappointed father. "I only thought it just possible, perhaps, that, from your looking rather thin, as I fancied, you might be fretting yourself about being going to be married. For sometimes, as I am told, it does happen, Mary, that girls as young as you are, though they may fancy themselves very much in love at first, change their minds afterwards, and think they might like somebody else better. Has any thing of that sort come into your head, Mary? Or have you seen any thing in Mr. Vidal, to make you like him less now than you did at first?"

"Have you, sir?" demanded Mary, with a sudden

flutter of hope at her heart that caused her to speak with such eager quickness that her father thought the bare idea of such a thing had terrified her, and severely blaming himself for letting his own capricious feelings and suspicions interfere with her hopes, and her happiness, he replied, in the most earnest manner possible:

“Oh! no! my dear; nothing, nothing in the world, I do assure you. I really never saw a person who seemed on all occasions to know so perfectly well what it was most graceful and most proper to say and to do. I am sure it could be nothing but caprice that could make any one feel inclined to find fault with him. But somehow or other, I could not be quite certain, on account of your youth, my love, that you might not have a touch of caprice, as well as other people; and I only meant to tell you, Mary, that you need not be afraid to confess it to me, if you had, for that my notion is, that young girls ought never to be thwarted in such matters. Do you understand me, my dear Mary?”

Mary thought she understood him only too well, and it was not an easy thing for her to answer him, both on account of the soft and truly tender emotion which his ceaseless thoughtfulness for her happiness awakened, and on account also of her very

steadfast resolution that *no one* should ever know what was passing at her heart.

After the interval of a minute, however, she replied, with a little laugh which tolerably well covered her inclination to cry, "You are very kind, always, always kind to me, my dear papa, but I like Mr. Vidal quite as well as ever I did; only you know, when people are so very particularly clever, and full of talent, as he is, the seeing him constantly of course takes off the sort of wonder and surprise that is felt at first. One can't always go on being astonished at people, you know."

"Certainly, Mary, that is very true, indeed," said the squire, "and your saying it shows what a sensible, observing little creature you are! But now that we are talking together quite confidentially, and that there can be no harm or offence to anybody, in our saying to one another every thing that comes into our heads, I can't help asking you (and remember, Mary, that it is never too late for a woman, or a man either, to change their mind before the marriage service is actually performed), I can't help asking you, if you don't think there was something in the natural, unaffected *brightness of heart*, I think I must call it, which one couldn't help seeing in Richard Herbert, that was worth all the What I mean is," con-

tinued the good squire, pulling himself up, "What I mean is, that I don't think people ever do go on loving other people for being clever, so well as if but I can't express myself properly, somehow or other. And I am sure, my darling, if you really love Mr. Vidal, I would not say a word against cleverness for all the world. Only I can't help thinking, that when two people have agreed to be married together, upon rather a short acquaintance, it is always a great deal better if they find out that what they thought the most charming manners in the world at first, seem, as they go on, to want the never-ending newness that an affectionate temper gives. When this happens, Mary, I can't help thinking that it is better to say so, and be off at once."

Mary was cold and hot, white and red, alternately, as her father spoke; and had it not been that she knew, or fancied she knew (which, as far as her conduct at that moment was concerned, was precisely the same thing) that Richard Herbert loved Lucy, and was beloved by her in return, she would probably have told her father, not that she loved her cousin (she could have jumped into the river a great deal easier than she could have done that), but that perhaps she did not love Mr. Vidal quite enough.

As it was, however, that first and greatest terror of a young girl's heart, the being suspected of loving where she is not beloved, was not to be conquered; it closed her lips, closed her very heart itself.

It was with a perfect agony of self-accusation that she thought she still perceived strong suspicions as to the real state of her heart in her father's words, and the extremity of fear, lest he should do or say any thing which might betray her, made her positively wish that her marriage with Vidal was accomplished, that she might never again be exposed to any danger of the kind.

Abruptly, then, she changed the subject, or at any rate the tone of their discourse, and said: "Perhaps, papa, it may be very right for people who have changed their minds to say so, but when that is not the case, I assure you that the very idea of such inconstant and dishonourable conduct is quite terrible!"

She said this with so much unction that the squire positively started, and stared at her as people do upon suddenly awaking from a dream. It never occurred to him as possible that Mary could *wish* to deceive him; and all his too just and too truly sympathising observations fell to the ground at once.

He almost trembled at the foolish temerity of his own conduct, which had risked the saying such unkind words concerning the beloved of his Mary's heart, and only found comfort in believing that she had not understood him. And so they parted, with a still greater want of confidence between them than when they had met.

CHAPTER VII.

NOTHING could have been more favourable to the ultimate success of Mr. Vidal's scheme for obtaining possession of Dalbury than the conversation which has been related in the last chapter. All doubts of her own power over herself, which had of late been sadly tormenting poor Mary, now vanished before the terror of being involved in scenes infinitely more painful still. She so well knew her father's devoted affection for her, that she believed him capable of doing *almost* any thing rather than see her forcing herself to keep her engagement with Vidal, if he thought Herbert was dearer to her heart; and all the sin, and all the misery which might, and, indeed, must ensue from any such interference on his part; made her determine after an hour or two of most painful meditation, to speak openly to Lucy on the engagement which she sup-

posed to exist between her and Richard, and to advise her at once to confess it to her father.

Mr. Clementson had never named Richard Herbert to his daughter since the morning that the youth, in order to clear himself of the charge of ingratitude, had confessed to the squire his hopeless love for her. For at the time this avowal had been made, the squire still retained his undoubting belief in the mutual affection of Vidal and Mary, and he thought that it would be both ungenerous to his young relative, and painful to the object of his hopeless affection, were he to betray the secret.

Neither had he ever again referred to the supposed attachment between the young lieutenant and Lucy. He thought the mistake would be sure to correct itself without any interference of his; and as Richard on his part had been too generous, when taking his farewell of the squire, to say a word about his last strange interview with the coachman's daughter, beyond a quiet assurance that Lucy did not any longer entertain the idea of his being attached to her, every idea of there having ever been such an attachment suspected between them had almost faded from his memory, and if ever he did think of it, it was only to repeat to himself that his Mary had blundered sadly.

As to the notions of Mary herself upon the subject, they were by no means very clear; but Lucy had so repeatedly told her, as a simple matter of fact, that Richard hoped some day or other to be able to marry her, that she had never permitted herself for a moment to doubt its being true.

And yet there had been moments too, when she had seen something in the eye, and heard something in the voice of Richard Herbert, which had told a different tale. But Mary had assured herself so very often that this could not be any thing more than fancy—her own foolish, oh! much worse than foolish fancy, that she had very nearly forgotten that she had ever believed it possible. But she had not forgotten what Lucy had once said upon the subject, and the hints which had now dropped from her father, so very plainly proved that the same idea respecting her feelings towards her cousin had occurred to him, that the more she meditated on the subject the more fully she became convinced that the best thing that could be done for all parties would be, leading Lucy to declare frankly the engagement which she could not but believe existed between them.

It was a painful business, and not the less so from the disagreeable consciousness which pressed upon

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her, that she did not love Lucy with the same warm and confiding affection that she had done before their introduction into company had opened her eyes to certain deficiencies, both in manner and feeling, of which before she had been quite unobservant.

“ But it is rather my fault than hers,” thought the generous girl, as she meditated upon her own altered feelings. “ What right had I to expect that it could be otherwise?” And it was, therefore, if not with all her former love, with almost more than her former observant kindness, that, having got her into her own dressing-room, she thus addressed her:

“ I dare say, my dear Lucy, you have not forgotten the time when you gave me a lecture about Mr. Vidal. Though so much has happened to me since, it is not very long ago. You have not forgotten it, have you?”

Lucy coloured. Yes, much had happened, and it all seemed to rush upon her memory at once, as Mary uttered the phrase.

But she contrived to reply to it with great composure, saying, “ Oh yes, my dear friend, I remember it very well. And if you do, I think you must be disposed to give me credit for some acuteness.

You have found that I was not quite so much mistaken as you fancied."

"You certainly seem to have been right in some of your notions," replied Mary, smiling and blushing at the same time, as she remembered what she had said on the subject of Richard Herbert. "And where you were right, dear Lucy, you perceive that I have given proof of not being obstinate in my infidelity. But now it is my turn to preach and to prophecy. Will you listen to me?"

"Listen to you? Oh yes, my dear Miss Clementson, most assuredly I shall listen to you. But I must hear your prophecies before I can promise to believe them."

The cheeks and lips of Lucy as she said this were as pale as marble.

What was there of any importance that Mary could now have to say to her, which would not touch either upon her connexion with Vidal, or her horrible conduct towards her mother?

Lucy at that moment felt no strength to combat either accusation. All the audacity, or, as she herself called it, all the noble strength of mind upon which she prided herself, seemed suddenly to have forsaken her. She felt as if she should drop upon the

floor, and in her heart she wished that she could cause it to open, that she might sink through it.

But this agony was but of short duration. Luckily for her, poor Mary felt too much embarrassed by the subject upon which she was going to speak, to raise her eyes to the face of her companion. She held her purse-twist and *crochet* in her fingers, and felt great relief in working with them very assiduously.

There was a moment's interval before she spoke again, and that moment sufficed to recall Lucy sufficiently to her senses to make her feel that it was not in the nature of Mary Clementson to speak on such subjects as those which were tormenting her guilty conscience, with such a tone and manner as she had used in addressing her. No sooner did this thought arise, than she recovered her self-possession completely, for it brought conviction with it. The blood returned to her pale cheeks and lips, and her eyes laughed in very scorn of herself at having suffered such a thing as Mary Clementson to affect her nerves so strongly.

Another moment sufficed to convince her that Mary, whatever the subject might be upon which she was going to speak, was herself very far from being at ease; and determined, let it be what it

might, to torment her, if possible, by her manner of receiving it, she prepared herself for the sport as a cat couchant does for the worrying a mouse.

“Well, then, what is it? Go on, my dearest Miss Mary. What is it you are going to preach to me about?” said she, coaxingly.

“Listen to me patiently, Lucy, there’s a good girl; and do not let any feeling of false delicacy prevent your following my advice, and making both yourself and the excellent young man who loves you happy,” said Mary, kindly.

“You have repeatedly told me, my dear girl, that Richard Herbert loves you. But he is gone, and I hear no more of him; which leads me to fear, Lucy, that he has not had the courage to confess his attachment to my father. If he is engaged to you, my dear friend, have the courage at once to confess it to me, with free permission to communicate the intelligence to my father.

“This is what you ought to do, for your own sake, and for Richard’s, as well as out of gratitude and respect for one who I think has treated you too kindly, Lucy, to justify your want of confidence. This is my preaching, Lucy Dalton, and as for my prophecy, it is this:—If you will let me tell papa the truth about it, though he may not at first hear

of the match with pleasure, it will not be his fault if your little romance does not end happily. Now then tell me honestly, are you not engaged to him?"

Lucy would greatly have preferred a few minutes for consideration before replying to this very direct question, and all she could get she did, by cleverly sitting for some seconds perfectly still, with her eyes fixed upon the face of her patroness with a look of gentle affection that might mean gratitude, or might mean sorrow, or any other soft and tender feeling; and during this short interval her rapid thoughts suggested the great probability that if she answered the question falsely, the lie would speedily be detected; and, therefore, though greatly contrary to her inclination and character, she replied, "You are altogether mistaken in your surmises, Mary. I am no more engaged to Richard Herbert than you are."

It would be difficult to describe the sort of feeling with which these words were listened to by Mary. To say that it was joy would hardly be correct, as the very same instant which brought them to her ear, brought also the recollection to her heart of the conversation she had so lately held with her father. What mattered it that her young cousin was free, since she herself was bound?

And then a feeling of indignation made the warm

blood rush to her cheeks, as she remembered the repeated confessions which she had received from Lucy, respecting the attachment existing between Herbert and herself.

Yet in the very next moment her good and unsuspecting nature prevailed again, and she was ready to accuse herself of all sorts of bad feelings for having fancied that poor Lucy, who probably was quite as wretched and more disappointed than herself, would willingly have deceived her.

“ Oh, no ! it was impossible.”

But how was it, then ? Was it Richard who had been to blame ? Had he basely and cruelly deceived the poor dependant girl ? Or had poor unhappy Lucy deceived herself ?

All this did not pass through the mind of the agitated heiress without affecting the expression of her innocent, ingenuous, and most speaking countenance ; and as Lucy's keen eye watched her, she felt more completely puzzled than she had ever been in her life.

A few short weeks before, the same emotions, following the same avowal on her part, would have been perfectly intelligible to her ; it would have been truly and correctly interpreted ; but, for once, it was the sincerity of her own feelings which pre-

vented the coachman's daughter from comprehending what she saw.

Though she strongly suspected that her Theodore's truth ought not to be trusted with very perfect security on any point, she was quite as passionately in love with him as ever, and it seemed morally impossible to her that any woman having once been made to believe herself beloved by him, once permitted to look forward to the ineffable felicity of being his wife, could really feel herself greatly moved by listening to any disclosures concerning the tender affections of Richard Herbert!

It was Mary who first broke the silent course of these meditations, and, notwithstanding the complicated nature of her own feelings, her words were as inartificial and sincere as ever.

"Why have you not told me this before, Lucy?" said she. "Why, after so often giving me to understand that my cousin was attached to you, and that you returned his affection, have you stopped short in your confidence, when you must be aware that I still believed your former statement to be true?"

Many a young girl in similar circumstances might have been at a loss how to answer such an appeal as this, without impeaching her integrity, either past or present. But not so Lucy.

“ Why did I not tell you, Miss Clementson, that every thing like love was at an end between your cousin and me? Is that your question, Mary? Then let me answer it by another. Why did you never ask me how matters stood between us? When he left Dalbury so suddenly, do you not think that I must have hoped, and expected, some mark of interest on your part, on a subject that so nearly concerned me? and, not meeting it, can you wonder that I had not courage to enter upon a theme so inexpressibly painful?”

Never did a young lady hit upon a better device for getting out of a scrape. The reply admitted of no rejoinder. Poor Mary was convicted, even in her own opinion, of having acted in a manner that must have suggested to her early friend the idea that she had become cold and reserved towards her; but though her heart did not quite acquit her of the charge, for she was conscious that she did not love Lucy as well as she used to do, she knew that it was not merely coldness and reserve which had prevented her from asking any questions respecting the terms on which she had parted with Richard Herbert.

But as this was a species of defence which it was not convenient to plead, she replied, “ I am sorry, Lucy, that we should have thus seemed to misunderstand each other. Perhaps I ought to have questioned you, but as your confidence was quite

spontaneous at first, I suppose I expected that it would continue to be so. However, if you *prefer being questioned*," she added, with a smile, "I will indulge you now. Tell me, then, how comes it that you and Richard have parted thus? Was it a quarrel that divided you?"

Now this was a question to which Lucy might reply by as many inventions as she pleased; for even were Richard to be examined upon the subject, which, however, was not very likely, she knew that there would be very little danger of his entering into any such particulars on the subject, as would prove her own statement untrue, and she therefore boldly replied,

"I am willing to tell you now, my dear Mary, what I should have been equally willing to tell you before, if you had asked me. Your cousin Richard is not rich enough to indulge his fancy by marrying so poor a girl as I am."

This was so obviously and evidently true, that, as an assertion, it could not but carry conviction with it; but Mary would have given a good deal, poor thing, engaged woman as she was, could one more question have been freely asked, and truly answered.

Was it Lucy, or was it Richard, who had first hit upon this bright discovery?

Had her cousin Richard gone away, in order to save himself from the too dangerous fascinations of

Lucy? or had he thought it best to depart, to prevent poor Lucy from expecting that, despite of prudence, he would offer to marry her?

Mary looked earnestly in the face of her companion, as if she sought to read the answer there, but she saw nothing but a beautifully fair creature, with a look of such exceeding meekness, that it was impossible to suppose she could ever have had the presumption to dream of an offer of marriage from a relation of her father's master, if the young gentleman himself had not put it into her head. So all the fault of so foolish and unmeaning an affair rested upon poor Richard, and Mary was very sorry to think how greatly he must have been to blame.

Yet, nevertheless, there *was* a feeling of joy at her heart, that made her wish to be alone, that she might think it all over.

And perhaps her remaining silent, after saying, rather in a careless manner, in reply to Lucy's last words, "Well, then, my dear, the best way is for neither of you to think any more about it," suggested to her observant companion that such was the case, for she got up, saying, "Now then, my dear Miss Clementson, as I have told you all there is to tell about my first and only little love affair, I will go down again to Mrs. Morris, who has promised to teach me one of her beautiful purse stitches which she has never shown us yet."

Mary nodded her consent, and in the next moment was alone.

But the attainment of her wish did not bring much enjoyment with it, for scarcely had she allowed her thoughts to rest upon the possibility that she might not always have been quite wrong in fancying that Richard was not so completely devoted to Lucy, as that fair girl had supposed, scarcely had one moment been given to the thought, ere she wrung her hands in a perfect agony of self-accusation, as she remembered that she was the affianced wife of another!

And then she appeared again to hear all her indulgent father's arguments in favour of inconstancy and breach of faith; and assuredly she thought that there *was* a great deal of good sense in what he had said. But had she not rejected and contradicted all his admirable suggestions? And was she not, when she left him, more firmly betrothed to Mr. Vidal than ever?

"Oh, what madness! oh, what sin!" exclaimed the poor girl, as she thought of all the feelings and all the motives which had led her to fancy that the best and most righteous thing she could do, was to accept the offered affection of a man, who, with all his extraordinary talents, had never really made any impression on her heart.

How sadly did she want a real friend at that moment! and how mysteriously true was the sort of instinct which led her to feel that Lucy was not one on whose judgment she could venture to throw herself!

As to her father, her too kind, too indulgent father, did she not know already what sort of language he would hold to her, did she go to him and confess that she had changed her mind, and that she now thought the best thing she could do was *not* to marry Mr. Vidal?

Could her conscience be satisfied by listening to such reasoning as this? And if she did listen to it, what was to happen next? Was her father to go to Mr. Vidal, and say: "Sir, my daughter Mary thought, some weeks ago, that she liked you quite well enough to take you for her husband; but now, sir, she has changed her mind, and hopes you will have the goodness to excuse her breaking her promise?"

No; her doom was fixed, and she must abide by it. But bitterly did she lament that her father had made the fatal discovery, that she was old enough to go forth among the rocks, the quicksands, and the shoals of this wicked, dangerous world. Had she still been enclosed within the shelter of Dalbury Park gates, having never gone beyond them, how happy, how very, *very* happy might she now have been!

The tears ran quietly down her cheeks, as she sat thus ruminating; and one fell upon her hand, and roused her.

She knew not that she was weeping; so profound, so absorbing had been her reverie, that she had lost all consciousness of where she was, and

what she was about. It was the first time in her life that she had ever wept from sorrow. Tears of tenderness, tears of pity, nay, sometimes tears of joy, had hung like dew upon her bright sunny cheek, but never till now had she shed tears from grief.

She was shocked and ashamed at her own weakness; and the thought of what her father would suffer if he could see her at that moment, and be led to guess her state of mind, did more towards restoring her to at least apparent tranquillity, than any thing else could possibly have done.

But though she ceased to weep, and carefully bathed her eyes, and arranged her dark brown curls, as if preparing herself for the drawing-room, she had no heart to leave her solitary chamber.

As she reviewed the circumstances which had led her to consent to the engagement which she now so bitterly deplored, she felt a sort of mournful pity for herself, that made it difficult not to weep again. She knew that she had intended to act well. She knew that it was a noble sort of feeling which had led her to place herself for ever beyond the reach of loving one who loved her friend, and was beloved by her in return. And never would she have shed a tear of regret for not being herself the object of his love, could she still believe that Lucy's tale was wholly and strictly true.

But she did not believe it.

How nearly it might approach the truth, or how

nearly it might approach the reverse of it, she had no means of judging. But there was an inconsistency in the statements which she had first made, with the light ending of the affair, which threw a strong degree of doubt upon the whole.

There was, however, one point that admitted of no doubt. She had herself promised to become the wife of Mr. Vidal; and firmly believing, in the innocence of her young heart, that his happiness depended upon her keeping that promise, she resolutely determined, that if her rashness was to mar the happiness of some one, she would herself be the victim.

On that day Mr. Vidal dined at Dalbury Park, and never had Mary welcomed him more cordially, or received his lover-like devotion with more gentle and confiding sweetness.

Yet with all the inclination in the world to listen to his charming singing with delight, and to admire him altogether more than she had ever done before, and a great deal more than she ever could admire any body else, the moment that she found herself, when the long evening was over, once more alone in her own bed-room, was the only one in which she really found any feeling like enjoyment.

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fortable. He had passed more than two very delightful and very important months in the agreeable neighbourhood, which was now about to be deserted, and he began to think that there was a sort of dullness creeping over it, which it would be greatly his interest to avoid.

He had blazed before the eyes of his affianced Mary as a star that illumined every scene in which it appeared, but he knew that his beams would seem to fade when the atmosphere in which he had so brightly shone was changed, and as he already possessed all the security that a promise of her hand could give him, he really thought that the safest as well as the most agreeable plan would be to absent himself for a time, and return to his noble future possessions at the gay Christmas season, when a moderately long visit would suffice to renew all the tender impressions he should leave. After that, nothing would remain to be done but to prepare for the splendid ceremony, for splendid he was resolved it should be, which was to unite him to the pretty heiress.

Besides, he should as a matter of course, be permitted to correspond with his affianced bride, and he liked the idea of possessing some letters from her written under such circumstances. Such documents always increased a man's security.

But there was one point on which he was a good deal troubled. What was to be done about Lucy? How could he live with her or without her? When

my hero first met the now forsaken Clara Maynard, it may be remembered that he had decided in the very inmost recesses of his heart, that nature had made her for him! Nor was that the first time in his life by many, that upon beholding a lovely creature pre-eminently gifted with the charms with which bounteous nature occasionally adorns her youthful daughters, he had yielded to the same belief, and persuaded himself with a simplicity of undoubting faith, which showed itself in no other part of his character, that she was expressly "*made for him.*"

This was his favourite phrase, and it expressed with a very respectable degree of accuracy what he meant.

If challenged to explain it, he would not have replied that such or such a woman had really been sent into the world by a special intervention of Providence, for the express purpose of embellishing a certain portion of his existence, but he would simply have said, that he, being himself conscious that he was formed with endowments both of body and mind superior to other men, could not encounter a female formed likewise on the same sort of half-divine pattern, without being aware that they were made for each other.

His really genuine belief in this doctrine (which in his own opinion had something exceedingly refined and mystical in it) was very decidedly one source of his widely-recognised power of fascination. This faith, which was in truth neither more nor less

than *faith in himself*, gave him a species of power which nothing else can give.

Those who have enjoyed an opportunity of studying, thoroughly, even one individual of the Vidal species, will be quite aware that this is true; but I have seen those who, having never made such investigation of character a study, have felt so strongly the sort of intoxicating effect produced by this intensity of faith in the conscious power of pleasing, as to bow their own faculties to the very dust before it, believing almost as firmly as the faith-strong individual himself, that he or she was something exceptional, and above the ordinary level of humanity.

But this is generalizing, and it is time I should return to my hero.

Had he, upon meeting the coachman's beautiful daughter felt the same sort of conviction which he had done upon meeting Clara, that she was a woman especially calculated by her character and the peculiar style of her attractions, to maintain a longer and more powerful influence over his feelings than any woman he had hitherto met, he would have been nearer the truth.

But even this would be more correctly stated by saying that Lucy had great powers of attraction for such a man as Vidal, than that such a man as Vidal had the power of really loving any woman.

As long as she continued to please him, he continued to feel for her the species of liking which he called love; but as to his thinking of her interest or wel-

fare independently of his own, he would as soon have thought of troubling his spirit about the destiny of the bright and beautiful stream that seemed to kiss his feet, as he sat in a warm evening of summer exhaling the odour of the woodbine that grew beside it.

Of such interest, however, and such affection as he was capable of feeling, Lucy was still the object; and so admirably, indeed, was she formed to suit him, that this interest and affection seemed rather to increase than diminish as days and weeks rolled on.

It is by no means uncommon to see women more true than frank. Many very excellent persons of both sexes are so; but I am of opinion that this is oftener found in females than in males. I have sometimes thought that the peculiarity to which I allude is kindly bestowed by nature upon the weaker creature in order to enable her occasionally to avoid placing herself too completely in the power of the stronger.

Did women, even when their hearts are true in attachment as is the needle to the pole, did they always frankly avow every feeling, every emotion, and every thought that finds place within them, as frankly as a true-hearted man does, they would often make wild work with domestic comfort.

I have never seen an example of this species of frankness in a woman without hearing her called either capricious, or wilful, or unfeminine; but in

general my own judgment has only found her deserving of the last epithet. I am deeply convinced that it is not accordant with a genuine feminine nature to be too frank; but I am quite as much convinced that those who confound this *restriction* in frankness with any want of truth, blunder most lamentably; and when man passes such a judgment, he blunders most ungratefully too, for nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of every thousand that this species of reserve exists in a married woman, it arises from a wish of pleasing, or a fear of displeasing her husband. How many women have I known, who, detesting the smell of tobacco smoke as much as any dainty man can do of an expiring lamp, have still declared with a smile which, under the circumstances, is really angelic, that *now* they were getting used to it they did not mind it at all. How many pretty creatures who had hated the sight of a boat till they had husbands who liked it, have I seen enter a yacht with love laughing in their eyes and sickness weighing on their hearts. This is not frankness, but it is love. How many do I know who, before marriage avoided the vicinity of a dog with utter distaste, who after it, would suffer the canine favourites of their husbands to soil their silken robes, and lick their shrinking hands with every appearance of being infinitely pleased by the compliment.

But all these, and a multitude of similar things show true love, though false seeming; and I fear-

lessly repeat that women incapable of this, are *unfeminine*.

But this womanly want of frankness, like pretty nearly every other quality in human beings, whether male or female, is either good or bad as it is modified, or not modified, by other qualities, which seem to act upon each other with a sort of moral chemistry, separating what is pure from what is impure.

In Lucy Dalton there were many qualities which, had they been subjected to this species of moral chemistry, might have left a valuable result; but from the want of it, they made her as inwardly foul as she was outwardly fair, and rendered her one of those exaggerated and deformed specimens of womanism, which short-sighted observers, and shallow dabblers in philosophy, quote as instances of the defective nature of the female mind.

She was still passionately in love with Vidal. A woman's first love is generally very tenacious, let the after growth which springs from its ashes be as various and capricious as it may; and all that was feminine in her mind (there was a great deal of rubbish that was not) was brought into vehement activity for the purpose of retaining her power over him.

In this respect her success was such as very plainly to prove that she was gifted with a large share of that species of intellect which enables some human beings to govern others.

This is never thoroughly effected, whatever the Robespierres of the earth may think of it, *by force*; for force never conquered the will, however much it may have appeared to do it. Lucy Dalton had a very great, a very extraordinary influence over the mind of Vidal. But she used no violence to obtain it; on the contrary, she ever seemed to his senses, to his memory, to his heart, to be a beautiful incarnation of his *beau* ideal of woman's love. And yet, in the midst of all this, he often felt as if he were afraid of her. Sometimes, he was afraid that he should lose her, and that he should feel her loss as a greater deprivation than he could bear. Sometimes, that she would lose him, and that her sufferings under such an infliction might lead to scenes so sublimely tragic, or so gallows-ward in their tendency, as might greatly interfere with the schemes of wealthy ease, and aristocratic enjoyment, which he was projecting.

Sometimes, while dreamily sitting over Mr. Norman's fire, and listening, or seeming to listen, with the patience which ensured his continued welcome, to some of that excellent gentleman's little original theories concerning the creation of the world, the idea would occur to him, that however much he might become master of Dalbury park, he should never find it a perfectly safe and tranquil residence, as long as his lovely Lucy made a part of his household; and when the hour came for again returning to the park, he would meditate during his walk

thither, upon the best way of suggesting to his lovely friend the dangers to which such a scheme might lead.

But though he had five different times set off, fully determined to appoint with her some extra hour of private meeting, in which to discuss this most important subject, he had never yet found courage, when the readily-granted *rendez-vous* had taken place, and there were no witnesses, but earth and sky, to hear them, he had never yet found courage to get further than a fondly caressing question, as to how they were to conceal their precious love for each other, when they should be dwelling in the same house, and he, the husband of Mary ?

And what did he gain by advancing thus far upon the dangerous ground ?

Once he got an earnest look into his eyes, which seemed to penetrate through all the little wily scales of artifice of which his accustomed armour was made, direct to the very deepest recesses of his secret soul.

And his secret soul quivered before it, and he started off from all he had intended to say, by exclaiming, "Ah! my Lucy! How secondary all such considerations become, the instant any idea of separation arises in reply to them!"

She smiled—but it was neither tenderly, nor fondly. And after the interval of a moment, she said, very quietly, "I hope so; if not—"

But there she stopped; and when, in gentlest

accents, he replied, "Go on, my love! let me hear all you have to say on a subject so vital to our happiness," she only shook her head, very much in the style of Lord Burleigh, but uttered not a single syllable more in reply.

At another time, when they were again *tête-à-tête* in consequence of a special request from him, he threw his arm round her, and pressing her to his heart, said :

"I wanted to tell you, Lucy, of an odious dream that has tormented me—not because I have any faith in dreams, my love ; you will not suspect me of that, but because it has suggested a whole host of horrible doubts and fears, as to the possibility of Mary's becoming jealous of you. Alas! my beloved girl! what an existence would both yours and mine become, if that were the case! You have no idea how this thought torments me, Lucy."

"It does not torment me, Mr. Vidal," said Lucy, with a good deal of scorn curling about her handsome mouth.

"Mr. Vidal? Oh, my Lucy, what a phrase is there! Suppose you were to take umbrage at something that might be said, or done, after my marriage, and that you should call me Mr. Vidal then? what sort of effect do you suppose that would be likely to produce on our domestic felicity?"

"Your domestic felicity!" repeated Lucy, her light eyes gleaming with a sort of lambent rage upon him.

“If I thought you in earnest, in supposing that any feelings commonly so called could be the result of your marrying Mary Clementson, I would leave you to enjoy it in peace. You would never see me more—yet I would not be far from you either, not too far, depend upon it, for you to feel my influence, both in your own person and that of your heiress wife—domestic felicity! Thick clouds and murky darkness rest upon it!” she added, speaking in a deep whisper through her teeth, and walking on beside him with her eyes fixed immoveably upon the ground.

It would be difficult to do justice, by any description, to the sort of vague terror which Lucy inspired in the breast of her still very ardent lover, when she thus clothed herself in the dark mantle of hints and inuendo.

Again and again he had endeavoured to shake it off, to brave it, to treat it scornfully (when she was not present, however), and finding this of no avail, he endeavoured to analyse it, in order, if possible, to comprehend the source and nature of a feeling so perfectly new to him, and so very far removed from being agreeable.

But this attempt was equally vain with its predecessors. He was in love with Lucy, still very passionately in love with her; but he was himself quite aware that his love was not of that perfect nature which casteth out fear, for that, in very simple truth, he did fear her. Yet the fear was not perfect

either, for it did not cast out love—they were, in truth, very strangely blended together. Nothing, perhaps, would, at that time, completely have cured the impassioned Mr. Vidal of his love for Lucy Dalton, of the intensity of which he was, however, proud, as offering a satisfactory proof to his own heart of the magnificent energy of his nature, nothing at that time would perhaps have sufficed to quench it, but discovering that the beloved one felt herself, believed herself, superior to him in innate power and indomitable strength of character—and that she was right in so believing.

But he did *not* make the discovery, and therefore the difficulty, the impossibility he would have called it, of living without her, remained as great as ever.

What, then, was to be done when he left the neighbourhood of Dalbury, in order to pass six weeks in London?

The obvious course was to leave her behind him; but not only did he shrink from the idea of losing her, he shrunk also from the danger of leaving her where she was.

Again, his fear of her troubled his repose. Should he deem it necessary, in writing to his affianced bride, to express with too great an appearance of sincerity the sentiments of love and admiration which she might probably expect, and did her confidential friend get sight of them, he thought it more than probable that his beautiful Lucy, in the

magnificent energy of her impassioned nature, might burst forth into a glowing assertion of her claims upon him, and defying the paltry rivalry of houses and lands, bid Mary set off and count her money, while she indited to the absent Theodore such a letter, as she alone, of all the women of the world, had a right to address to him.

In short, Theodore Vidal felt himself in a state of great trouble and disquietude. He had not yet told Lucy of his intention to go, though he had mentioned the absolute necessity of his being in London, both to Mr. Clementson and his daughter; and it was the fear that they might refer to this, when both himself and Lucy were present, which inspired him with sufficient courage to conquer his other fear, as to how she might receive the intelligence when communicated to her by himself, without witnesses.

The time which he selected for this communication was, as usual, the early morning, and the scene the closely-sheltered and very convenient flower garden.

Vidal was engaged to breakfast at the park, at ten o'clock, and nothing could be more natural than that, having met Lucy as he came, on one of her usual early rambles, he should join her, and then assist her in battling with the heavy dew, in order to obtain an autumn nosegay of lingering heliotropes and roses. So if they were caught, which was, however, exceedingly unlikely, no danger could ensue.

The lane in which they met, and which was immediately beyond one of the side entrances to the park, was as completely sheltered from all human eyes, as it was well possible that any lane could be.

It was screened from the park by a thick, and by no means a very young plantation within the paling; and a deep bank, surmounted by a prosperous quickset hedge, sheltered it on the further side; as it continued, moreover, in a perfectly straight line for about half a mile, the lovers, as they met, had only each of them to give one steady look ahead, in order to become satisfied that they might exchange a fond "good morrow!" in safety.

"My loveliest Lucy!" exclaimed Vidal, looking at the bloom on her delicate cheek, with passionate admiration. "How difficult it is to tell how, and when, you are most lovely! Is it when I watch your goddess port, as you enter a drawing-room? or when that matchless form flies through the circling waltz, with the light foot of Camilla, and Diana's graceful elasticity of limb? Is it when fashion has been employed as your handmaid, or when, as now, that beauteous, fresh, cold cheek meets my lips, like a new-blown rose that has been sprinkled with the morning dew?"

Lucy answered this string of difficult interrogatories, by holding up her beautiful face to her lover, as if to advise his trying again the last-mentioned experiment; and having complied with the hint in a style of very fervent obedience, he gently led the

conversation to the perilous subject which it was his purpose to discuss during their *tête-à-tête*.

"Ah, my Lucy!" he began, "what a moment is this for me to talk to you of parting! Yet where should I look for one that would be good for it? I cannot behold you, dearest, without feeling that I cannot pronounce the hateful word, 'offensive to love and to thee,' but at the risk of destroying all the dear positive and present happiness, which the being thus linked together seems to bestow upon both!"

"Then why pronounce it at all, Vidal?" she replied, fondly pressing the arm she hung upon to her heart. "What need is there that we should mention, or even think of a misery which we are both of us so ill-prepared to bear?"

"The need, my precious love, arises from the absolute necessity of my going to London. My pecuniary affairs certainly lie in a very small compass, compared to those of Mr. Clementson; but, nevertheless, they are of much less simple arrangement. He means to settle his broad lands after a certain manner, and he achieves the object he has in view (important as it is), by sending a letter by the post to his solicitor, and lo! the process begins with all the steady certainty of steam; and when finished, the result is forwarded to him by the same succinct mode of communication. Two or three names are written in ink, where pencil ones had been scrawled before, to prevent mistakes, and

thousands per annum are made over with little more trouble than it costs to write to one's tailor for a new coat. But in my position, dear love, the case is widely different. Small as my possessions are, much more of my own personal attention is required to arrange them properly for the event that is hanging over me. In short, my Lucy, I must go to London, and does it not follow, dearest, that I must, therefore, be separated from you?"

"The separating from me," replied Lucy, in her very gentlest voice, "*may*, certainly, be the consequence of your going to London, but not of necessity, Vidal."

"What mean you, Lucy?" returned the lover, changing colour from the feeling of alarm which her words occasioned him. "Think, Lucy, think of the consequences which might, which must ensue, were we to leave this place together! What disguise, what artifice, could we hope to make effectual in concealing the fatal truth? What would become of you? What would become of either of us? I have no means, as I have frankly told you before, my dearest girl, I have no fortune that would suffice to secure to us the common comforts of life. Think, then, of the madness of which we should be guilty, were we to elope together! Think of the long lives of luxury we may be able to command, by suffering my project of marriage with this wealthy heiress to take effect, and then contrast the picture with that which would justly represent our fate, if

we permit our courage to fail, and our purpose to be abandoned, in order to avoid a separation for a week or two!"

Mr. Vidal's alarm had betrayed him into greater warmth of expression than was quite prudent. At least, for once in his life, he had spoken with sincerity, but the effect was not such as to encourage him to make the same dangerous experiment again.

Lucy listened to him, indeed, with the most exemplary patience, never uttering a syllable till his voice had completely ceased, and even then not attempting to say a word in reply till a sufficient interval of silence had followed, to convince her that he had perfectly finished his harangue, and then she said,

"I did not think, Vidal, that you had been a man likely to be so completely beaten down by a paroxysm of terror, as I have now seen you. I cannot sympathise with the feeling, my good friend, nay, so foreign to my nature is the weakness under which you now appear to be suffering, that I am quite at a loss to know what I ought to say to comfort you. Perhaps, my dear friend, you had better hasten forward to the house, and endeavour to procure a few drops of hartshorn, or of red lavender, or any of these '*peevish medicines*,' as our squire calls them, in which nervous folks take such great delight. I will not run on with you, or before you, for fear the maids should suspect my

being in love with you, but I very strongly recommend that you should set off running yourself."

Vidal's heart swelled with indignation and rage as he listened to her, and had it not been that her spirit kept his spirit in awe, he would probably have answered her in such a manner as might have led to a quarrel, which would not have proved a renewal of love; but as it was, he mastered himself, and replied, in a tone that had more of sorrow than of anger.

"Alas! my love! how cruelly you prove to me that what is death to me is sport to you! The idea of our being separated has been a load upon my spirits almost greater than I could bear, but to you it is only a signal for mirth."

"I beg ten thousand pardons, my dear friend," returned Lucy, gaily, "I misunderstood you totally. I fancied that the terror you so painfully displayed, arose from your thinking it possible you might lose the heiress, and at this terror I jested. Had I believed it to be occasioned by your dread of parting with me, I should have felt it differently."

"These are precious moments, Lucy," replied Vidal, "let us not waste them, either in chiding or jesting. The future that lies before us may, I am convinced, be converted into a most delicious existence, or into what would be exactly the reverse of it. But the alternative rests not alone upon the one point of our being asunder or together. We might be together, yet I might only divide my time be-

tween the duplicate miseries of watching you, as the wife of another man, and of enduring the wretchedness, when not watching you, of knowing myself to be the husband of another woman. Do you remember, Lucy, the moment in which I long ago asked from you a pledge that you would not be the wife of another without my consent? Do you remember this?"

"Oh! yes, perfectly. And I remember, too, that we both of us became aware afterwards that such a pledge would be the proof of more folly than love, just, you know, as you thought afterwards, respecting the promise which you gave my, my mother." And something like a pang seemed to shake the iron firmness of the beauty's soul as she pronounced the word.

"True," returned Vidal, slightly colouring, "and well has it been for us, my love, most well, most fortunate, that we have never as yet committed ourselves by any overt act of folly, though there have been moments in which such danger has threatened us. But to return, my Lucy, to the two different, far different paths which I see before us. That our mutual love is the greatest treasure which we either of us possess, I know, yet not on that account is it the less certain that, in order to draw from it all the happiness it is capable of bestowing, we must not strip it of all the elegance, of all the refinement, of all the grace, which we both know, my Lucy, is only to be found where fortune smiles, and, therefore to wish—"

“ Hold! Mr. Theodore Vidal! hold, I beseech you!” cried Lucy, interrupting him with a tone of proud authority. “ All these paltry, little reasonings for and against, I know not what, suit not the character of my mind, suit not (permit me to say so) the strength and compass of my intellect. You talk with envy of the facility with which Mr. Clementson is able to make his arrangements. Trust me, sir, it will be your own fault if you make not other arrangements of equal magnitude, and with no greater difficulty.

“ But it is time, I tell you, Theodore Vidal,” she added, “ that well as I love you, and I do love you well, I will not suffer my spirits, my talents, my courage, to be paralysed and frittered away by eternal discussions on what we can do, and what we cannot, or what we will do, and what we will not. I am not made for such see-saw work. Examine your own mind, Mr. Vidal, before we go on any further, and tell me with the frankness which my trust in you has deserved, whether you believe you have sufficient firmness of character to lay down a rule of conduct for yourself, and to abide by it.”

Never had Lucy Dalton looked so beautiful as while she thus addressed him. The youthful bloom, the fair, silken hair, the proud, yet flexile form, which suggested powerfully the idea of resemblance to all our notions of one sort of angels, joined to the lofty tone, the proud determination, and the unbending will, which almost as strongly suggested

- her resemblance to the other sort, produced together an effect upon her accomplished, but wholly drawing-room lover, which made him feel for the moment a strong ambition to become as sublimely sinful as herself.

As yet he had never done any thing which, from its atrocity, could be likely to endanger the place he had so ably acquired in society, because, most fortunately for him, he had not found society too pure, or in any way too good for him.

Indeed, whenever it had happened to him to find himself accidentally thrown into contact with persons whom he suspected to be capable of requiring something more than external elegance and sparkling talent in their friends, he invariably backed out of the acquaintance, and rather more briskly, perhaps, than when a contrary sort of discovery took place, showing the necessity of backing out, because some new acquaintance had proved too bad for him.

But as he now listened to the beautiful young girl beside him, he felt strangely certain that she would be less scrupulous than himself, as to the modes and manners of obtaining what she wished. (Perhaps her mode of disposing of her mother had thrown some light upon the deeper and more hidden parts of her character.) But there was nothing like distaste, or even disapprobation, produced by this.

Vidal saw that she was beautiful, he knew her to possess great talent, and he now believed her, more than he had ever done before, to be gifted with a

powerful mind, capable of sustaining herself and the man she loved in danger and in difficulty, and of embellishing every peaceable and prosperous hour of his existence by her bold originality of thought, and the noble superiority of spirit by which she would keep both herself and him from ever being nauseated by satiety, or mildewed by the canker of *ennui*.

He looked at her steadfastly as she spoke, and even continued to gaze upon her in silence for a minute or two after she had ceased, and then exclaimed:

“Do not yourself so great injury, my Lucy, as to suppose it possible that you can have bestowed your heart upon a man incapable of comprehending or of applauding your glorious character. By Heaven! I reverence you at this moment almost as much as I love you; and freely, wholly, and without the shadow of reserve do I now declare myself willing to abide by whatever you shall propose, as the best mode of disposing of ourselves, during the dangerous interval which has still to be passed before I obtain a legal claim to the fortune of this stupid girl. Speak, dearest! My trust, my reliance on you is unbounded!”

Lucy paused in their slow, onward walk; and turning herself round so as nearly to face her lover, whose arm, however, she still retained, she looked up into his face with a smile that had both love and satire in it, and said:

“I think you begin to know me better than you

■ did, Vidal. Perhaps you would not now pick my mother's pocket of any paper, because you feared it might fall into my hands?"

"You wrong me, Lucy," he replied, but it was with more of deference than displeasure; "you wrong me by supposing that it was from any doubts respecting the use which you might make of that idle paper, that I withdrew it from the possession of your mother. You can scarcely suppose it when you remember that the only effect of your using it at all would have been to destroy an only chance of obtaining the wealth which we have both so candidly confessed to each other is necessary for our happiness. Remember, too, the condition of your mother at the moment when I thus put it out of her power to do us harm, and then say if you still feel it possible to retain your unjust suspicion of my motive?"

"You make a very able defence, Theodore," returned his companion, again resuming their walk, "and I listen to it with the more pleasure, because your conduct upon that occasion gave me a degree of pain that was almost intolerable. It made me despise you, Theodore! Never were you so near losing me for ever as at that moment, and nothing prevented my taking a resolution, which if once taken, would never have been recalled, of never beholding you again, but the suggestion by my own heart of the motive which you have now assigned. But even so, Vidal, you sinned against me, for if

you doubted not my love, you doubted my power of watching over the interest of him on whom I have bestowed it. I am not the poor, silly creature that you took me for; and now, Vidal, before any important resolution is made, or step taken, that shall bind us more firmly to each other than we are bound already, I will tell you frankly, and with steadiness of purpose, equal to the steadiness of my love, that I cannot brook suspicion from the man to whom I devote myself. It would be easier for me, Theodore, to turn away from you this moment, knowing that I should never look upon you again, than to live at your side UNTRUSTED."

Vidal's first answer, and the movement was really spontaneous and sincere, was given by suddenly throwing his arm round her, and drawing her towards him.

"Could you, Lucy?—Could you turn away and leave me?" said he.

She lent his cheek upon his bosom, and replied with her own peculiar smile, which he still thought the loveliest in the world, "There was an *if*, dear Vidal, *IF*, the immortal peace-maker leaves nothing in my words, but what you should be well pleased to hear. Would you wish for a mistress, Theodore who would consent to live by your side, untrusted?"

"No! Lucy, no!—I could wish for none but you, you in your own noble nature. You in your own matchless loveliness! With all the bewitching

softness of a woman, and all the unvacillating firmness of a man. Oh, Lucy! you were made for me!" he added returning involuntarily to his favourite hypothesis, and believing, as usual, that he saw a reflection of himself, in all that he thought admirable in her.

"Was I made for you, Theodore?" And as she repeated his words, she shook her head, doubtfully. "I do not know that! I cannot say I feel sure of it. I let you read my heart more freely, perhaps, than you let me read yours, and this may explain a doubt on my part, which you do not feel on yours. Shall I put you to the proof, Theodore? Shall I offer you a test that shall prove at once whether we are indeed fitted to come together into such close union as that we have spoken of? Shall you fear to let me apply such a test to your sincerity?"

"No, by Heaven!" he replied, "I fear no test, Lucy, than can be applied to prove the sincerity of my love to you."

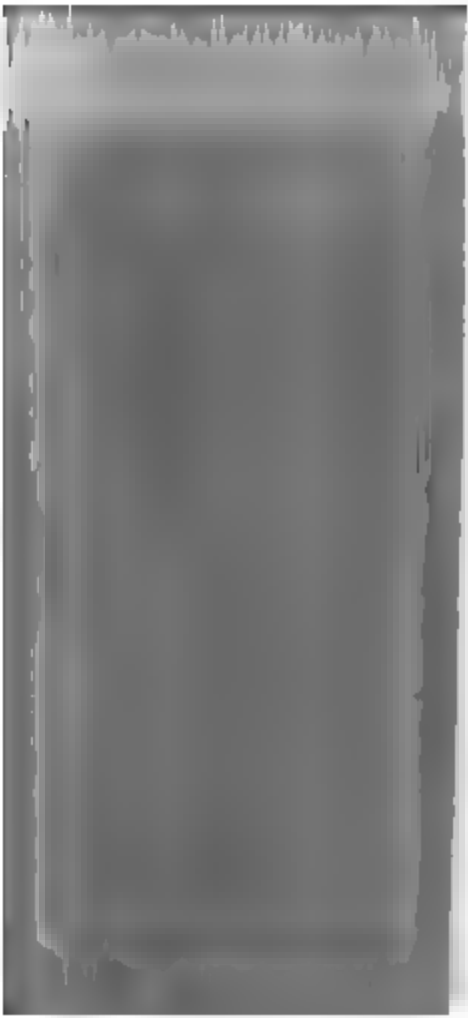
"The sincerity of your love? But suppose I were to confess to you that this would not content me?" said she. "Suppose I were to tell you that the most impassioned love that man ever bore to woman would not suffice me, without assurance, and that not merely shown by words, that your faith in me is as firm as that which you have in your own soul? Would you shrink from the test, then?"

“No, Lucy, I would not!” he very eagerly replied, evidently desirous of proving to her that the resolute spirit she displayed had met its match, and that she *was* made for him.

“Thank Heaven!” returned Lucy fervently; and suddenly pressing the hand of her lover to her heart.

“Now, then, I once more seem to breathe freely. Once more I can tell myself that *I love*, and not feel my cheek tingle with a painful blush, lest he I love should be unworthy of me! Oh, Vidal! you must know me better still, ere you can be quite aware how bitterly my spirit can reproach me when I yield to any feeling that I deem weak, and unworthy of me! I know I need not tell you, dearest, that such self-reproaches are not the result of offending against the world, or the world’s law. I scorn the idle curb which such fools, and such folly could put upon me. No! It is the court that is holden here!” and again she pressed his hand against her heart, “it is of this court only that I stand in awe. Were I to yield myself the willing slave of a man who, though he love me, would not trust in me, my existence would be one long agony of remorse.”

“No, my Lucy, no!” cried Vidal, passionately. “Oh, fear it not! Your sunny life shall pass in growing more assured with every fleeting hour, that the man whom you have blessed with your love, is in every way worthy of you. Now, then, my angel, for your test! Let me know it, Lucy,



making him stay
she looked fond
sternness too, in

" Write for
promise of marriage
which you drew
my mother—to
of its falling into

" I will obey
I could give you
undoubting love

" It is enough
Theodore! Let
part for long!
long. For now
one!"

CHAPTER IX.

THAT Lucy was fully satisfied by the result of this meeting, is certain; whether Vidal was equally so upon mature reflection may be doubted; nevertheless her influence, in its mixed nature of love and fear, was too powerful to be resisted; and on the morning following, when they again met, while Lucy was employed in culling her morning bouquet, the promise of marriage, repeated with scrupulous exactness in the same terms as that prepared for the widow, was put into her hand by Theodore.

The manner in which she received it, relieved his mind from any doubts as to her motives, which might have arisen during the night, to torment him. She took it from his hand with an action that seemed to evince great indifference for the document itself, for she crushed it in her hand, and then appeared to retain it almost by accident; but her spirit seemed to speak in her soft eyes as she fixed them upon her lover, and said:

“ Now, Vidal, we stand towards each other on

something like terms of equal trust, and equal love. That I have trusted you, is not first proved to-day, and never again can the heart that doats upon you, be wrung by doubting the trust that you feel in me, in return. This act, Theodore, so almost childishly unimportant in itself, yet so unspeakably precious from the inference I draw from it, will render all our future arrangements easy—at least comparatively so—I do not quite mean to say, dearest, that I shall see you set off for town, while I remain in the country, without feeling a pang here,” and she pressed his hand to her bosom, “but I do mean that if our mutual interest requires the separation, I shall be able to submit to it—not without suffering, but without repining.”

“Then you agree with me, sweet love,” he said, “in thinking that during this indispensable visit of mine to London, it will be better for our interests that you should not accompany me?”

“Most assuredly I do,” she replied, with unhesitating decision.

“In fact,” she added, “the only mode by which I could do so, would be by my setting off before you, and taking care that it should be supposed I had gone to rejoin Mr. Richard Herbert. This, doubtless, might very easily be managed, without compromising you, but, on the whole, I think it greatly better that it should not be done.”

“I grieve to say that I, too, think so!” replied Vidal. “Yet I could say much, my Lucy, in favour of your going, if I dared.”

“ I doubt it not,” she replied with an enchanting smile; “ but I must not let you say it—whether it will be possible to continue our present manner of living after your marriage with Miss Clementson, I think very doubtful, but at present it is, I am persuaded, the best system we can pursue.”

“ Beyond all question,” he eagerly replied, “ were it only for the sake of meeting constantly, yet without danger, during the period when we shall all be together in London, previous to my marriage. For were you to be established there under any other roof than that of Mr. Clementson, the danger of our constantly meeting would be very great. Should the separation prove necessary afterwards, the case would be wholly different. If you will fearlessly place yourself under my protection, my sweet friend, most surely I will fearlessly profit by it.”

“ Yes, Theodore!—such is my purpose,” she replied. “ The old squire and his daughter have, fortunately, neither of them the least notion of ever leaving their dull old Dalbury for a permanent residence in London, and you may therefore establish *me* there, without our either of us tormenting ourselves by anticipating any seriously dangerous consequences from it. For, in the first place, I may easily get up a quarrel either with your lady, or with yourself, dear love, which shall render my leaving the house a matter of necessity—and I can also easily be too angry to let any body know which way I am going.”

“Assuredly!” he replied, “all that will arrange itself, as the French say, and then, a very little caution, will keep every thing most decorously in order, afterwards.”

With this conference ended all Mr. Vidal’s difficulties as to his departure for London. Every one seemed to think it perfectly natural that he should find it necessary to go there; and go he did, after passionately conjuring both his affianced wife, and his mistress (in conferences which followed each other at the interval of half-an-hour), not to let him pine through the miserable period of absence, without the sweet consolation of frequent letters.

To this petition the mistress said, “Yes,” adding, as she fondly leaned upon her lover’s shoulder, the somewhat stale quotation—

“Letters invented for the wretch’s aid!”

et cætera; and the affianced wife did not say “no,” because she knew not very well how to manage it.

* * * * *

Mary Clementson must have been quite as young in heart as she was in years, or she could not have yielded to, and enjoyed, so perfect a feeling of relief, as she experienced upon the departure of her graceful and accomplished lover.

Had she never seen Richard Herbert, it is possible that she might have gone on for years in a state of unwearying admiration at Mr. Vidal’s various talents and graces; but as it was, she had become so tired of both, and of the unceasing plaudits which

she heard showered upon them upon all occasions, that the finding herself beyond the reach of it all, made her feel again as light-hearted as a bird.

Any young lady, situated as Mary was, in consequence of the unbounded indulgence of a doating father—that is to say, on the point of being married to one gentleman, while her affections were privately devoted to another—any young lady so situated, would be likely to experience a sensation of relief on the departure of the man whom blundering fortune had allotted to her, but few would have felt their spirits rise as hers did, or have become so giddily forgetful of the future, while giving herself up to the enjoyment of the present.

As to her father, he was pretty nearly as thoughtless and as happy as herself; and from some unaccountable deficiency in his reasoning powers, he witnessed, felt, and most keenly enjoyed the restored hilarity of his giddy daughter, without ever giving a single thought to the circumstance which caused it.

He was not, however, quite so devoid of reflection as to the cause of his own greatly improved condition of mind; on the contrary, he thought a good deal about it, and was not only quite conscious that it was occasioned by the departure of his elegant son-in-law that was to be, but was very sorry for it, and blamed himself exceedingly for his want of appreciation and good taste. He was quite willing to confess that it was a great misfortune to be born with such deficiencies, but at the same time,

he thanked God for giving him a cheerful spirit, which enabled him to endure the mortifying consciousness of his own stupidity without repining.

Perhaps it is not quite fair to say that he bestowed absolutely no thought upon Mary's improved cheerfulness, and the cause of it, but his meditations on the subject certainly never carried him further than a sort of pleasant conviction that his darling was happy, because he was.

Neither was it possible for the rest of the family to see her again running about the house, like a lapwing, or hear her returning to her old habit of singing snatches of all the gayest songs she knew, while she did so, without making some observations on the change.

Both Mrs. Morris and Mademoiselle Panache immediately became aware of it, and compared notes on this subject, as upon all others, with the most amiable and friendly frankness.

"One might almost say," said Mrs. Morris, "that our dear girl was positively rejoiced because her *futur* had left us. What wonderful spirits she is in, dear creature! Do you not observe it, mademoiselle?"

"Observe it! Ma chere amie! How is it possible not to observe it? I never hear her voice in the morning, when she is dancing along to the dressing-room of le cher papa, without thinking that I hear the notes of an *alouette*."

"But this is only since Mr. Vidal went away,"

remarked Mrs. Morris, with an inquiring glance at her companion.

"You are quite true, *chère amie*!" replied the Frenchwoman, "but that explains itself so easily. It is still a child you know, and I find it so natural that her happiness at the thoughts of this *hymenée charmante* should never have betrayed itself thus openly whilst the *futur* remained before her eyes! The young girls are so sensitive! Would you not have been *ebahie, chère amie*, if our Mademoiselle Marie had shown herself so *extasiée de bonheur* before Mr. Vidal, as she does now?"

"Yes, indeed, that is very true, mademoiselle," replied Mrs. Morris, with an assenting nod. "I have no doubt that you have assigned the true reason of this remarkable change in the dear child's manner. It is really sad to think how soon we shall lose sight of her altogether."

"Ah! que voulez-vous?" returned the philosophical Frenchwoman. "It is a charming child, and she loves us both too well to forget us."

In the servants' hall the same mysterious question was discussed, and there, from want of *les bienséances*, which had enabled Mademoiselle Panache to account for it so satisfactorily, a good deal of surprise was expressed, both by the serving ladies and the serving gentlemen, till the mystery was solved by Mrs. Marshall, who thus expressed herself upon the occasion.

"Well now! I do wonder at you all! Nothing,

or us, under sun
when he was aw
and dancing, as
should like to be
ward to having a
rate elegant new
difference, I don'

"And that's
many, in chorus.

Lucy, too, had
Clementson's gain
phant!" thought
Very well. To-d
many morrows."

After a good de
was at last decided
and her "three la
Monkton describe
and Lucy Dalton,
upon his excursion

metropolis. The squire said not a word against this reasoning, which carried with it all the appearance of common sense, and the excellent and well-behaved Mrs. Morris expressed herself so strongly, yet with so much respectful propriety upon the subject, that he was induced to nod his head and reply, "Very true, ma'am, very true." Upon which the word went forth, and travelled throughout the household, that "Master was going by himself."

In the select committee held the next morning, however, in the squire's dressing-room, this decree was reversed after the exchange of a very few words between the individuals who formed it.

"And are you really going to leave me all alone, papa, that is to say without yourself?" said Mary, in a voice from which the recently renewed gaiety of tone was quite banished. "I shall not like it at all."

"And how much, do you think I shall like it, Mary?" returned the squire, looking piteously up in her face.

"Then good gracious, papa, why should you do it?" said Mary quickly, and looking at him with a sort of severity of aspect which seemed exceedingly undutiful.

"And you won't laugh at me then when I tell you that I could no more make up my mind to go into Kent and leave you behind, than I could make up my mind to go to the galleys?" said her father, rubbing his hands, and showing his strong white

"But how
frighten me

"My dear
speak with
priety as I
that I could
because she

"And so
my eye, you
gentleman, be
of giving a
order to him
good Mrs. M
good for the
little Mary be
Oh, papa! Ye
very politely if
the trouble."

"Hold your
delighted squire
staying at home

look, and to feel, most *unreasonably* happy, as they finally settled their quarrel by a kiss.

This weighty question respecting the Kent journey being thus happily settled, and all personal superintendence of that portion of the squire's property postponed *sine die*. The family at the park seemed suddenly to find themselves restored to the same condition, not morally but physically speaking, as they had been before Miss Elizabeth Jenkins had proclaimed the advanced age of "Madam Dalbury."

"Might one not think that all which has past since last August was a dream?" said the squire, as the family, including the two governesses and Lucy Dalton, were seated round the tea-table in the little drawing room at the park.

"One might, indeed," said Mrs. Morris.

"Oh, yes!" said Mademoiselle Panache.

"If it were not—" resumed Mrs. Morris.

"Ay, ay, if it were not," said the squire, interrupting her, "we all know that, Mrs. Morris, we all know that."

And then, though very particularly against his inclination, poor Mr. Clementson sighed audibly.

"What does that mean?" thought Mary. "Is it possible that he suspects—that he guesses;— no, no, it is *impossible*, he cannot suspect, he never shall suspect, that I am not as happy as he, dear soul! has laboured to make me."

And then a very bright thought struck her, which

promised to produce agreeable results in many ways. "I believe, papa," she said, "that the only family of all our new acquaintance, who have not run away from us, is that at the Town Head House. I believe that they have all recovered from the influenza now, and I should very much like to see something more of that beautiful Clara Maynard. As you have been so very obliging as to put off your detestable Kentish expedition, perhaps you will go with me and call there to-morrow."

"Willingly, Mary," replied the squire, "and the more willingly, because they are *not* new acquaintance. I have known the Miss Jenkinsons a good deal longer than I have known you, my darling."

Lucy, who was occupied upon a piece of worsted work, which, besides being very beautiful, had the advantage of offering an apology for not speaking, whenever it was particularly convenient to her to sit silent, heard this conversation with some feeling of alarm.

Excepting the parties themselves (including Clara's aunts), she was the only individual that had any knowledge whatever concerning the extent to which the "*flirtation*" (as it was called in the neighbourhood) had gone between Mr. Vidal and Miss Maynard. She knew that Vidal had offered, and had been accepted, and though she did not know precisely what had passed at their last interview, Theodore having only told her that they had had a *quarrel* which had ended in their eternal

separation, she shrewdly suspected that the idol of her affections had probably got rid of this inconvenient engagement, in a manner more creditable to his *habilité*, than his integrity.

The idea, therefore, of any acquaintance, that might by possibility ripen into intimacy, being set on foot between Miss Maynard and Miss Clementson, alarmed her greatly. The more she had meditated upon the idea of an independent home in London, under the protection of Vidal, the expenses of which should be supplied from the revenues of Mary Clementson, the dearer had the scheme become to her.

It is true indeed, as we have seen, that Lucy Dalton had thought it advisable to keep a promise of marriage in her possession, but this was only in case of the worst, which *worst* was her lover's ceasing to be in a situation to maintain her handsomely as his mistress.

The projected visit to the Town Head House was fixed for the morrow; but Lucy felt sure that if she feigned illness apparently sufficient to excuse her saying to the heiress, "Oh, Mary, how I wish you were not going out to-day!" the visit would be postponed, and that before it took place she might be able to obtain counsel from her lover as to the best means of preventing the mischief she feared. She accordingly wrote to him by that night's post, and received, through the agency of one of the footmen, who had, for a trifling gratuity,

been often useful to her, the following letter in return:

“Ten thousand thanks to you, my best—ah no! that is but an idle phrase—my only beloved, for the watchful love and tender thoughtfulness which dictated your letter of this morning. But fear not, sweetest. Miss Clara Maynard is not a sort of person who can ever do us any harm, being most hopelessly of that gentle tribe who ever are, and ever must be, more sinned against than sinning. She would no more think of enlightening our sapient little Miss Mary on the sundry tender love scenes which have passed between herself and me, than you would, dearest, recount those more genuine ones, of the same nature (at least as to name), which have bound me heart and soul to my Lucy. Let the young ladies meet, my fairest! as often as they like, and assure your dear, anxious heart, that no harm will come of it.”

It is not necessary to transcribe the remainder of the epistle, which was rather a long one, and written in such a passionate style of fondness as must have reconciled her, if it had been possible that any thing could, to the enforced absence of the adored writer. The receipt of this charming letter not only refreshed the spirits of the fair Lucy, but it entirely restored her health, and after thanking Mary with touching sweetness for having so affectionately indulged her in the longing she had expressed for her society, she entreated her to postpone no longer the

visit she had intended to make, as she was now perfectly well, and meant to treat herself with the perusal of a new novel, which had just arrived from town.

As this conversation took place at ten o'clock in the morning, there was abundance of time to arrange the morning's excursion afterwards, and the squire, though he had ordered his horse to carry him on a visit to an old clerical acquaintance in a parish at some miles' distance, changed his scheme for the morning the moment his Mary proposed it, and the father and daughter set off *tête-à-tête* for the Town Head House.

Had Miss Elizabeth Jenkins and her sister, Miss Anne Jenkins, been made aware, by cabalistic or any other art, that Mr. Clementson and his daughter Mary were coming to pay them a visit, it is highly probable that they would not have been admitted within the doors of that venerable mansion. For though it is certain that sundry baskets of fine fruit, together with a very plentiful supply of game, continually sent from the Park, in the joint names of the squire and his daughter, had, together with a little sage and wholesome reflection, done a good deal towards convincing the two sisters that perhaps, after all, the squire had not really been false-hearted, but only imprudent, or, in other words, that his motives had been from the first mistaken. Though this *was* certainly the case, the closely-kept secret of Mr. Vidal's offer to Clara rankled in their

aunt's bosoms, and rendered the well-founded report of the heiress's intended marriage so extremely disagreeable to their feelings, that the sight of her was by no means an honour that they wished for.

During the continuance of the influenza in the house, Mary and the squire both had repeatedly called, but without intending to go in, and the present visit, therefore, took them entirely by surprise. Before they were let in, however, it ought to be mentioned that Clara Maynard's feelings, on hearing of the projected marriage between Mr. Vidal and the heiress, were not in the least degree in unison with those of her respected relatives.

The Misses Jenkins indeed, knew little or nothing of the real nature of Mr. Vidal's valedictory manœuvrings. Clara had merely stated to them, without comment, and in as few words as possible, that Mr. Vidal had proposed a private marriage to her, which she had rejected without giving them the trouble of any consultation on the subject, as she felt convinced that it would be as repugnant to their feelings as to her own. In this they both declared that she had done them no more than justice; and when she informed them of the solemn promise of secrecy she had given him, Miss Elizabeth readily promised that it should bind them as firmly as herself, considering that the whole affair could never be alluded to or remembered without the deepest mortification on their parts; for the good ladies were fully persuaded that the unfortunate Mr. Vidal was the victim of

some cruel and avaricious tyranny on the part of an uncle, or aunt, or some other atrocious relation, who had positively refused to consent to the marriage on account of the smallness of Clara's fortune and expectations.

To Clara herself, however, the affair wore a very different aspect.

Till the report of Mr. Vidal's engagement to Mary Clementson reached her, she was greatly at a loss to explain to herself the reasons of his extraordinary conduct; but that explained the whole mystery at once, and Vidal appeared before her very nearly in his true colours, though there were some dark shades of inequity in the back ground, to which she had not penetrated.

Far different, therefore, were her feelings towards her pretty neighbour from those experienced by her two aunts; for, whereas they considered Mary as having robbed their niece of a splendid establishment, by accepting the hand of her (nobly) rejected lover, before the hopeful influence of time had been permitted to do its conciliatory work on the hard heart of his proud relations, she looked upon the poor little heiress as about to be made the victim of her own wealth.

Her heart really ached for her, and much, oh! very much, would she have given, could Mr. Clementson and his daughter have been made acquainted with what she felt certain was the real character of

Vidal, without her breaking her solemn promise in order to give them the information.

The two old ladies, or more correctly speaking, the old and the elderly lady, received their visitors with a good deal of stiffness, which their kind and cordial manner, however, soon obliged them to relax, for there was, in fact, no possibility of resisting the squire's friendly unconsciousness that there was, or could be any reason in the world why they should not be as good friends as they had been a dozen years ago.

Clara's manner of receiving Mary was so sweet, so engaging, so attractive, by its gentle kindness, that the young heiress was delighted, and preferred a request in a whisper to him who had never yet refused any request of hers, that Clara might be invited to come and pass a few days with her.

No sooner had the whisper ended than the squire instead of answering Mary, said aloud: "My dear neighbours, do you think you have influence enough with your fair niece Clara to make her forgive the awkwardness of my little girl (you must still let me call her little girl, Miss Elizabeth) will you excuse her awkwardness in making me the speaker of her wishes instead of being so herself, and prevail on your dear Clara to return with us to the park for a few days?"

The two aunts looked at Clara, and Clara looked at the two aunts.

There was on both sides a consciousness too strongly felt to require any words to explain it, that there would be something queer in Clara Maynard's making a visit of intimacy to the future wife of Mr. Vidal.

But the person the most concerned in the matter, that is to say, the fair Clara herself, had nothing whatever at her heart to render any such feeling either painful or lasting, while her inclination to cultivate the friendship of her pretty neighbour was gaining ground every moment.

Mary saw the kind glance which Clara's beautiful eyes threw upon her, while she was waiting, as it seemed, for her aunts to reply to the question which had been addressed to them, and no longer feeling timid enough to wish for any more ambassadorial interference in the business, she sprang forward with the youthful warm-hearted ardour of manner which was so completely her own, and throwing her arms round Clara, exclaimed: "I must leave you, papa, to negotiate my pardon with the Miss Jenkinses, but I must deal with Clara myself. You are my prisoner!" she added, playfully keeping possession of her arm. "Will you yield if I promise you quarter? or must we do battle unto death?"

"I yield, I yield!" replied Clara, in the same gay tone, "and if my conqueror will only give me five minutes to collect my harness and housings, I will follow her as her willing thrall, whithersoever it shall be her pleasure to lead me."

After this, the business was settled between the elders of the two houses without difficulty or delay, and before Miss Maynard re-entered the sitting-room equipped for her unexpected expedition, it had been arranged that Clara should remain till the end of the week at Dalbury, when her two aunts were to be sent for at the hour of dinner, that they might be on the spot to take her under their protection when she drove home at night.

All this being settled, the squire led Clara to the carriage in triumph, while Mary, escorted by a Miss Jenkins on each side of her, followed to the door of the house, and before she reached it, her pretty, smiling, cordial thanksgiving for their kindness, in suffering her to run away with what must be so very precious to them, went far towards melting away all that had been curdling in the shape of fancied injury round their hearts, and they saw her drive away with their niece in a frame of mind which seemed a good deal to astonish themselves; for, when they had retreated into the house and closed the door, Miss Anne looked up into the face of Miss Elizabeth and said:

“Is it not odd, sister?”

“Yes, sister, it is very odd,” was the sincerely acquiescent reply. “Upon my word and honour, I don’t know whether I stand upon my head, or my heels.”

“Well, Elizabeth, that is just exactly what I feel. Perhaps, sister, we ought not to have let her go,”

said Miss Anne, while a shade of anxiety succeeded to the smile which Mary Clementson had left upon her brow.

The answer she received to this, however, was: "Nonsense, Miss Anne! What harm did that pretty, innocent-looking creature ever do any of us? Bygones ought to be bygones; and so let them be with us, in God's name. The old gentleman is no bad neighbour after all; and as to his one little pet lamb that he makes such a fuss about, I am ready to confess, and I don't care who hears me, that she is the most bewitching little imp of a child that I ever looked upon in the whole course of my life. As to keeping her at arm's length to the end of our days, and she such a near neighbour too, it would be no more possible than to shut out the sun. So, if you will take my advice, Miss Anne, you will forgive the squire for the sake of his daughter."

"Well, I do believe that *will* be the best way, and that is what I will do," replied Miss Anne.

And this excellent resolution was not one of those which are sent to assist the formation of that mosaic pavement, that is said to be ever in progress in the dwelling which, though sometimes alluded to, may not, as we all know, be ever distinctly "named to ears polite."

CHAPTER X.

THE barriers which had kept Clara Maynard and Mary Clementson asunder being once broken down, it was impossible that they could fail of becoming truly attached to each other ; and the unlucky heiress found, when it was rather too late to alter her domestic arrangements in consequence of the discovery, that it is more convenient, for many reasons, for young people to select their friends and associates from among persons in their own station of life, than out of it.

She was positively astonished to find how much more she was *at her ease* with Miss Maynard, than she had ever been with Lucy Dalton. From a very early age she had been aware that a word, a look, a thoughtless phrase, were enough to destroy "poor Lucy's" happiness for the rest of the day ; and the same sweet spirit which had made it so absolutely necessary for Mary to have some female friend of her own age to love and make much of, led her, after the coachman's daughter had been established

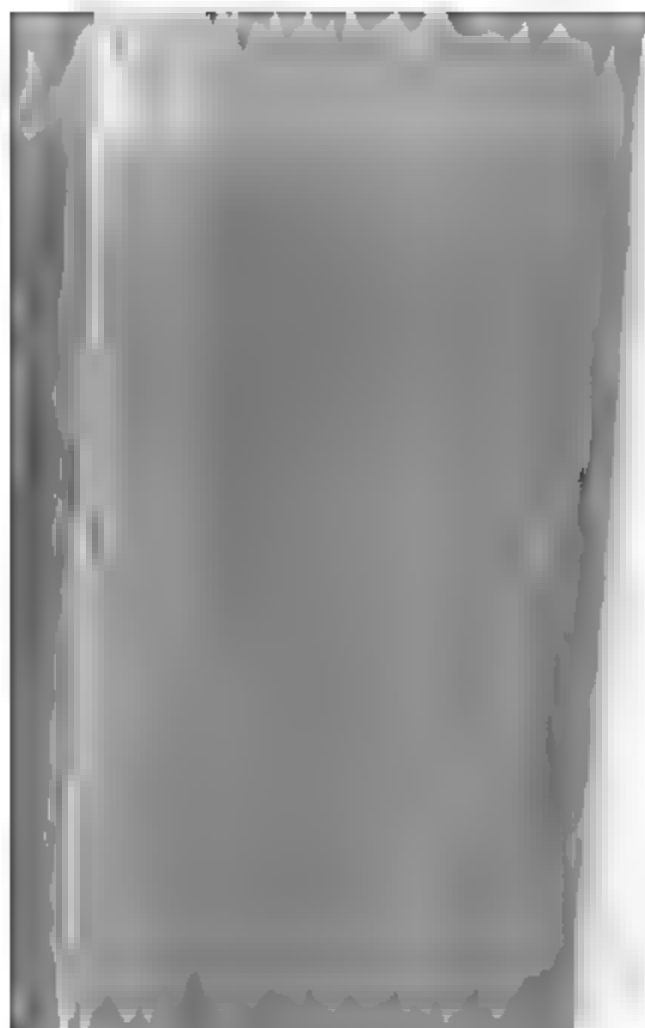
in that capacity (*faute de mieux*), to sacrifice her own will, her own wishes, and her own whims, whenever they did not happen to be the will, the wishes, and the whims of her companion also.

Nor was it this perpetual bending of her own inclinations before those of another which produced the chief evil of the ill-assorted connexion between them—for Mary could easily have borne that without being very clearly conscious that it was any evil at all—but it was the watchfulness necessary to guard the sensitive dependant from any feeling of degradation, which sometimes weighed heavily on her spirits.

Yet even this never came to the sweet-tempered girl in the shape of a misfortune of her own; she suffered from it greatly, because it gave her the feeling that she could not make “poor Lucy” so happy as she wished to do, and this thought often annoyed her cruelly.

But with Clara her own buoyant light-heartedness was all restored to her; she was as gay as a bird, and there was a sort of racy freshness in her intellect, which made Clara find her a most delightful companion, though she had none of the deep thought or high imaginings, which unconsciously approached to the elevation of genius in herself.

But though not alike in temperament or elevation of character, they *were* alike in firmness of principle and purity of thought; and from this there speedily arose a sentiment of true and genuine affection be-



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by one imprudent act, render himself for ever and for ever incapable of watching over, and guarding from all ill, the lovely, innocent, light-hearted being, who so fondly, so confidingly hung upon him, was terrible! and every hour passed in their society made it more so.

At length, unable to endure the idea of returning home, without making some little effort to avert a catastrophe which she looked forward to with such miserable anticipations, Clara determined to lead the conversation to Vidal, when she and Mary should be conversing together (it was a subject which as yet had never been alluded to between them), and she flattered herself that she might be able, without breaking her pledged word, to make some general observations on the indiscretion of hasty marriages which might produce effect. She managed this admirably well.

The moment that the subject had reached the point at which Mary could give her entire confidence to her new friend, without appearing to intrude it, she did so. And then the conversation went on for some minutes, as it might do between any two young ladies, the one of whom expected to be married very soon, while the other with perfect sincerity, protests her belief that she is not in the least degree likely to marry at all.

“Ah! Clara,” said Mary, “I cannot think *that* at all likely; but if it should be so, or, at least, till the time arrives that it be otherwise, I trust that you

will not be cruel enough to forget the heart you have won *here*," and Mary with a graceful and speaking action, pressed her white hands upon her bosom.

"That, I never can, dearest Mary," replied Miss Maynard. "I have never had opportunity, nor to say truth, inclination either, to form many intimacies, but some how or other you have managed to make me love you at very short notice, and I do not think I shall escape from your fascinations very easily."

"Well then," resumed Mary, gaily, "at any rate I shall look forward with confidence to the happiness of possessing a dear female friend, which, whether married or single, must always, in my opinion, be a very essential ingredient in a happy life."

At this moment Lucy entered the room.

That she should not like, or love Miss Maynard very greatly, was perhaps but natural; considering that she had heard Vidal more than once confess that he *had* been in love with her, and still thought her extremely beautiful; she had, therefore, left her patroness to cultivate this new friendship, without either hindrance or assistance from her; taking care, however, to prevent her absence from appearing, in the eyes of Clara, to have any cause, save that of her own will, by frequently alluding to the impossibility she felt of leaving her new book till she had finished it.

But now it was to be presumed, that the book

was done with; for, Miss Dalton not only entered the room, but proceeded to arrange her little steel vice upon the table, in order to proceed with the netting of a purse.

Whether her entering at this particular moment was the result of inspiration, or whether, as she accidentally passed the door, her ear might have so nearly approached the key-hole, as to enable her to catch the name of Vidal, it is not necessary to inquire.

Whatever was the cause of her being there, the young ladies to whose society she had now joined herself, did not think it necessary to change the subject of their conversation on her account, and Miss Maynard proceeded to say, what she was about to do when she entered, in reply to Mary.

“I quite agree with you, dear Mary—not even the most perfect *beau ideal* of married life would content me, unless I might have a female friend into the bargain. But though I see no reason why the having a husband, should prevent you from having a female friend also, I suspect it would be more difficult to achieve it, than if there were no husband in the case.”

“As how?” said Mary, who, naturally enough, did not understand what she meant.

“As thus,” returned Clara; “I think, for instance, that as long as you remain in single blessedness, the most cautious of human beings would not be likely to object to a pretty considerable degree of

intimacy with you—but I do not think it follows that people would feel exactly in the same way if you married a man who was not generally known in the neighbourhood. Why now, even in the case in point, if you will forgive my freedom in saying so, even in the case of your marrying Mr. Vidal, you may depend upon it, that a great many people, who might be well enough disposed to be intimate with you, would be apt to say when talking about it, ‘*but who is Mr. Vidal?*’ and that, you see, is what I mean, by saying that it may not be so easy to form friendships after marriage, as before.”

Mary Clementson coloured and started as Miss Maynard pronounced these words, and repeated, scarcely knowing that she did so, “Who is Mr. Vidal?”

“Yes, my dear,” said Clara, faintly smiling and blushing as vividly as her friend, “depend upon it, this is a question that many will ask, though not absolutely of you—and, in my opinion, your dear papa must take care to be ready with a satisfactory answer, or the good people will never be satisfied.”

“Who is Mr. Vidal?” thought Mary, sitting down at her toilet-table, when it was time to dress for dinner, but without ringing for her maid. “Surely she is very right. Surely there can be no harm in my repeating her words to papa. And this is what I will do,” she added in silent soliloquy;

and having arrived at this determination, she felt restored to her usual comfortable feeling of constant reliance upon him, and rose for the purpose of ringing the neglected bell.

But before she reached it, Lucy, with long accustomed freedom, entered the room.

"I won't detain you a moment, dearest, from your dressing duties, nor myself either," she said; "but I could not resist coming in for half a moment to quiz your charming new friend, the least bit in the world. Not but what she is a most charming person, in every way, and I assure you that I admire her quite as much as you do, but yet, Mary, it was impossible to help laughing *sub rosa* a very little, at her little fling at Mr. Vidal's want of title!"

"His want of title? What can you mean, Lucy?"

"Why, did you never hear the wicked story that Edith Springfield was so fond of telling about the beautiful Miss Maynard, because people had taken it into their heads to say that she wanted to marry him? and that the eldest of her aunts, the one who is always talking of her dear mother the Lady Arabella, you know, said to somebody, when his engagement to you became known, that she would not have suffered her niece to accept him for any consideration in the world, because he had no title, and therefore, that it was impossible for any one to tell who he really was? Don't be angry with me,

dearest Mary! I don't mean to be ill-natured, for I like her excessively, but if you had given me the world, I could not have helped laughing at hearing that beautiful Miss Maynard go over again so cleverly, the same ground that the old ladies had been trotting upon before her, for the purpose of proving to you, that Lord Randal's intimate friend was a mysterious unknown vagabond! After all one has heard about Miss Maynard's partiality to the gentleman, I think you must confess that there *was* something droll in it."

"Upon my word, Lucy, I shall confess no such thing," replied Mary, ringing her bell. "The words were merely to illustrate her meaning, when she said, that friendships were not so easily formed after marriage as before it. And I dare say she is quite right, though it never struck me before."

"Well, dearest, don't look so awfully grave about it," returned Lucy, kissing her forehead, "or I shall think I have really made you angry, which would not be fair, because I am quite certain, that if you had heard Edith Springfield mimicking Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, when she was explaining, for the satisfaction of all hearers, how it came to pass that the beautiful Miss Maynard had failed, at last, in securing the conquest which had been so much vaunted at first; if you had only heard this, as I did, I am quite sure you must have laughed too."

"I am sorry you think so, Lucy," replied the pretty heiress, rather gravely. "Edith Spring-

field is very clever, but she is much too ill-natured in her gossipings to give me any inclination to laugh."

"Well, well, good bye, little gravity. You shan't hear any more of Edith's good stories," returned Lucy, gaily; and Mrs. Marshall entering the room, she left it with a laughing nod—but not till she had effected the purpose for which she came into it, which purpose was to sneer away any impression that the words of Miss Maynard might have made; and she had done it.

It never entered the head of Mary Clementson for an instant, that Lucy had never in her life heard the name of Vidal mentioned by Miss Edith Springfield, and knowing how very notorious a joke throughout the neighbourhood the Miss Jenkins' love of title had become, she felt no inclination to let her father's name be joined to theirs on such a subject. "Besides," thought she, "if I repeated what Clara said, by way of a grave hint to him, it would certainly look as if I doubted his discretion a little."

And thus poor Clara's effort to avert the danger of her friend, failed utterly; but she was spared the pain of knowing it, for though Mary never recurred to the subject again, she had shown too much emotion when the warning words were uttered, not to leave a very reasonable hope on her mind that they might be profitably remembered.

The five days of this pleasant visit flew rapidly away, and so did the weeks which intervened be-

between Mr. Villars's departure for London, and the time fixed for that of the Clementson party for the same place. Mr. Villars, indeed, when taking leave of them, had declared that he could not live through the interval unless he were permitted to run down to the park for a day or two; but his letters, as the time for his doing this approached, spoke of business which he sadly feared would render this indulgence impossible. In a letter to Lucy he explained this by saying, with more sincerity than was usual to him in his amatory explanations, that he was afraid to run the risk of meeting her after so long an absence, before eyes so greatly to be feared as those which would inevitably be upon them at the park.

"Once in London, dearest," he added, "all danger may be easily avoided, for I have a friend at whose house I can safely meet you, not only without fear of betraying myself, but where we may be able to talk over all the multitudes of arrangements which it will be necessary for us to make for the future.

"The more I think of the plan which I sketched to you in a former letter," he continued, "the more I feel persuaded that it is the best we can adopt. Your request to be permitted to see your mother before you leave the country can surprise no one. That you will find her convalescent, *there is no great reason to doubt*; and if this be so, you must see some person in authority at the asylum, and ask his opinion as to her being in a state of

mind that may authorise her release; if the answer be in the affirmative, of which I have likewise no doubt, you must declare, *first*, your ardent desire to watch over her yourself; and *next*, the impossibility of your taking this charge upon you, without the assistance of your kind and generous friend the squire.

“And then, dearest, will follow your appeal to the kindness and generosity of both father and daughter, which will be liberally answered, you may depend upon it, if it were only for the purpose of getting out of the obvious difficulty arising from the question of what is to become of the young lady's companion, when the young lady is married.

“This part of the business once arranged, all will be plain sailing before us; you and your mother will occupy the prettiest abode I can find for you, either in London, or very near it; and there, or very near it, I shall, when once safely married, take the liberty of being as much with my fair idol, as my ever and for ever adored Lucy will permit. I really see nothing in any part of this arrangement which does not promise well. It explains your leaving them *most* satisfactorily. The necessity of the best medical advice for your mother, points out London as the properest place of abode; and all fears of any trouble that the old lady herself might give us, are neutralised by our knowing how very easy it is to put her *hors du combat*.

“In short, my angel, the future smiles upon us;

and if it be not our own faults, I see years of happiness and unfettered enjoyment for us both; nor should I, my Lucy, be in the least degree surprised, if, as a sort of *tour de force*, I were to have the triumph of receiving my adored mistress as a visiter at the park! Your mother, you know, to be left, of course, in the most careful hands; and my Lucy so affectionately anxious to revisit the scenes of her childhood, that she shall accept the earnest invitation with delight! Would not this be delicious, dearest?"

The letter from which this passage is an extract was, as usual between the correspondents, a very long one, and, as usual, conveyed to the hands of Lucy by her friend the faithful footman.

Within three weeks after it was received, the long-fixed time for the removal of the family to London arrived.

The tearful governesses bade a long farewell to the luxurious home which had so long sheltered them, and the good squire and his daughter turned away from it with spirits not much more gay; but Lucy stepped lightly into the carriage after them, for she had accurately and successfully obeyed the instructions of her beloved.

She had seen her mother, who either was, or seemed to be, totally ignorant of the share which she had had in her incarceration, and had obtained a certificate from the physician of the establishment permitting her removal whenever it suited her

friends to receive her. Nor was this all the business she had got through. She had "opened her heart," as she called it, both to the squire and his daughter on the subject of her *feelings* respecting her unhappy mother.

"To watch and attend upon her," she said, "is my first duty, and I should never sleep in peace if I neglected it. The change in my position will indeed, be dreadful, but I must learn to bear it, and it cannot lead to feelings so bitter as those which would be produced by the pangs of conscience if I shrank from it. As to the means of existence," she continued, with a sigh, "I must seek to find them by giving daily lessons, perhaps I may be fortunate enough to meet with a settled situation as daily governess, where the hours of attendance may be such as to permit my giving some portion of my time to her."

"Nothing of that sort will be necessary, my good girl," said the squire, greatly touched by the high feelings and excellent principles thus displayed, and perhaps too, a little pleased, as Vidal had predicted, by this easy mode of arranging a separation which he had previously felt to be both necessary and difficult, "nothing of the kind will be at all necessary. You have been a great comfort to my daughter during her childhood, and now that she is a woman you will not find her likely to forget it. I intend in conformity with her wishes and my own to settle a hundred a year on you, Lucy, for your life, and another hundred a year upon your mother

for hers. which, if you live together, as you very properly intend to do, will I hope enable you to live comfortably."

That Lucy's gratitude was expressed in the most ardent and touching manner is too much beyond the reach of doubt to make any detailed mention of it necessary; but it is but justice to her talents to observe that even the squire himself, although certainly not particularly partial to her, could not help impressing a kiss upon her forehead, the first with which he had ever honoured her, as he replied, "Say no more about it, my dear. You are a good girl. and you deserve it."

CHAPTER XI.

It was exactly one week after the departure of the Clementson family for London, that Arthur Lexington, having done every thing that either his own wisdom, or that of the faithful Martha Squabs could suggest, for the protection and comfort of his aunt, arrived at Compton, after an absence of more than four months.

He reached his lodgings at six o'clock in the evening, but left them again within an hour afterwards, to pay a visit to his old friend, Mr. Norman.

Nothing could be more cordial than the reception he received at Fairy Ring; it was so cordial, indeed, so full of affectionate gratitude for the promptitude with which the visit was made, that Lexington could not bear to leave the old gentleman under the false impression that this extraordinary eagerness was occasioned purely by his affection for him, and he therefore stopped him short in his expressions of gratitude by exclaiming,

"Not so, not so, my dear old friend. Let me tell you the truth at once. I should not be in Shropshire at all, or if there, I should not be at your house, were it not for a sentiment stronger still, my dear Mr. Norman, than even my life-long affection for you. Yet it was your letter that brought me home, for I found in it what I suspect you never intended it should contain, namely, a gleam of hope upon a subject which I have been spending years in teaching myself to contemplate with despair."

"You speak in riddles, my dear boy," returned the old gentleman. "My letter contained nothing, as far as I can recollect, but a little idle gossip about our neighbours, a little grumbling about my own gout, and an honest assurance that I was very sincerely yours; under which of these heads was it, Arthur, that the Pandora treasure lay?"

"The first, Mr. Norman. It was conveyed decidedly by what you class as gossip about your neighbours. But you must unsay that terrible word *idle*, at least if idle means untrue."

"No, it does not mean that, Arthur, at least as far as I am concerned. I totally forget what I did write about, but I can answer for it, that whatever it was, I believed it to be true when I wrote it."

"But do you believe it to be true still, Mr. Norman? Do you believe that Mr. Vidal is going to be married to the daughter of Mr. Clementson, of Dalbury?"

"Yes, most certainly I do believe it," replied his

old friend, "and when I tell you that the pretty little heiress, her father, and suite, all set off for London, exactly a week ago this very day, for the purpose of buying wedding clothes, executing settlements, and all other necessary preliminaries for the marriage, I suppose you will believe it too."

"Then it is *not* true that he ever admired Miss Maynard?" said Arthur, eagerly.

"I don't know about that, my dear fellow," returned Mr. Norman, laughing. "I suspect you go a little too fast there. Indeed, if I speak the truth, I must say that I *know* you do, for he was rather more confidential to me on the subject, than it is usual for gentlemen of his age to be with gentlemen of mine; and, *entre nous*, Arthur, I am rather disposed to believe that nothing but the *beaux yeux* of little Mary Clementson's *cassette* could have enabled him to overcome his passionate admiration for the beauty of the Town Head House."

"What is it you mean, my dear sir?" cried Lexington, strongly agitated. "Is it possible that this man, this Vidal, can have dared to address her, and then changed his purpose?"

"Your question is an embarrassing one, Arthur," replied Mr. Norman. "I do believe that my geological friend did pay Miss Maynard a great deal more than ordinary attention; and, if you will understand it merely as the expression of my own belief, unauthorised, remember, by any positive communication on the subject on his part, I will honestly add, that I think he proposed to her, and

I also, but upon no better authority, believe he was accepted. That something passed between him and our old friends at the Town Head House, which left a strong feeling of offence, nay, a strong sense of injury on the mind of Miss Elizabeth, I am quite certain, and I suspect, moreover, that for some reason or other, she does not choose to express all she feels on the subject, for in her conversation with me, I detected many symptoms of longing to abuse him, and many symptoms of very evident restraint upon herself, to prevent her doing it. But when, at length, I asked her if she knew of the great match he was going to make, she flew off in a tangent to the farthest part of the room, saying, however, before she left me, 'I shall be greatly obliged to you, Mr. Norman, if you will never mention that person's name to me again. I am bound by a promise not to say all I know of him, but that is no reason why I should submit to be pestered by hearing his detestable name.' Now this, Arthur, in conjunction with the fact, that during the beginning of our geological intimacy he was perpetually cross-examining me on the probable fortune of Miss Maynard, and that during the latter part of it he never mentioned her name, but began, by gentle degrees, to insinuate his hopes of obtaining the pretty heiress, leads me very strongly to suspect that Mr. Vidal's devotion to natural science is the best side of his character, and that Lord Randal has introduced to the neighbourhood a gentleman who is more accomplished than estimable."

"Who, and what is he?" demanded Lexington, abruptly.

"Nay, my dear Arthur, that is a great deal more than I can tell you," replied the well-born old gentleman, with a slight shrug. "We must, however, of course, take it for granted that Lord Randal knows something about him, and we must *hope* that our worthy neighbour, Clementson, knows a great deal more. But his lordship set off for Ireland before this great marriage was publicly announced, and he has therefore escaped the questioning which would have been sure to fall upon him, had he been here. And as for the squire, he is such a singular original, that it is impossible to feel sure that he has taken all the precautions in this matter which every other man would feel necessary. He is as unsuspecting as a good child, but as wilful as a naughty one."

This discussion on the character of Mr. Clementson might have had some interest for Arthur, had it arisen at another moment, but now he had no ears for it, no comprehension for any thing but the painful fact that his own situation with respect to Clara appeared to be more uncertain than ever.

As abruptly as was at all consistent with the observance due to his valued old friend, the harassed and dispirited Arthur took his leave; and notwithstanding the fact that he had not been in bed since he left Paris, he walked as slowly as it was well possible he could do from Fairy Ring to his own abode.

But the time thus spent was not lost. He reviewed, by the calm light of the wintry moon, every circumstance of his situation relative to Clara, and before he lay down to rest he had decided upon the line of conduct he would pursue, with a steadiness of purpose which calmed his nerves, and enabled him to sleep more soundly than he had done since he received the agitating letter of Mr. Norman.

On the following morning he went to pay his important visit at the Town Head House at an early hour. He knew the habits of the family, and that the best moment for catching Clara alone was immediately after breakfast, when Miss Elizabeth invariably descended to the kitchen, and Miss Anne repaired to the flower-garden, which it was one of the chief delights of her very innocent life to keep in perfect order, let the season of the year be what it would.

The plan answered perfectly; the two aunts were very safely occupied in the manner above mentioned, and Clara was found by him sitting alone in their winter parlour.

The effect of his sudden entrance upon Clara might have confirmed all his former shadowy and unprofitable hopes as to his not being an object of perfect indifference to her, had he himself been in a condition to remark any thing clearly; but he really was not. He had come there resolutely determined to act in direct contradiction to every thing that he had been fancying was most right

and most noble during the last three or four miserable years of his existence, and he equally determined not to return to his solitary home till he had learned, with all the certainty that Clara's own voice could give him, whether there was any chance that his life might one day become as dear as it was now distasteful to him.

With such mighty matters in his thoughts, he scarcely felt as if he saw the objects before him, and it was with a sort of desperate promptitude, which happily saved Clara the suffering which a vain struggle for composure might have cost her, that he instantly said, after taking the hand which with habitual friendliness was almost mechanically extended to him, and leading her to a chair, "Clara!—Miss Maynard!—it is too late now for either of us to examine whether my conduct was as wise as I intended to make it, when I determined to endure all the misery that a hopeless attachment can bring, rather than risk the leading you to marry a man who was too poor to place you in the situation in life that you ought to fill. Perhaps I should have done better had I placed the question in your hands, instead of enduring all I have endured, without even having had the consolation of believing that any feeling as tender as pity was felt for me. But the past is beyond recall. I meant to act honourably towards you, and it may be that I have only acted barbarously towards myself. There was a point, however, beyond which I had no strength, no cou-

rage to go. Since your very childhood, Clara, I have loved you passionately, and have endured the daily martyrdom of leaving you ignorant of my affection. But when I saw another address you, my resolution failed; it was more than I could endure, and I fled. While abroad I learned by a letter from Mr. Norman, that the man whom I believed to be your favoured and accepted lover was on the point of marrying Miss Clementson. The only strong sensation of pleasure which I have known for years was produced by this letter of Mr. Norman's. But it was a pleasure that could not last; nay, the very intensity of it convinced me that there could be no hope of any thing approaching tranquillity for me, till I had learned from your own lips whether—Miss Maynard, forgive the madness of the question—you would give up every hope of a suitable establishment in life, in order to become my wife?"

This speech was uttered, not with vehemence, but with great rapidity, and in the manner of one who, being engaged in a desperate race, feels that if he stops he must fall.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Clara Maynard was greatly agitated as she listened to him—so greatly indeed, that she might perhaps have believed herself unable to speak in return, had she not seen the almost frightful paleness of Arthur's countenance. That altered, agitated face so touched and terrified her, that she hastened to relieve him

from the misery of doubt, which she so well knew how to appreciate, with an eagerness that might be compared to that of a mother anxious to snatch her child from a state of danger and suffering.

"I would! I would!" she exclaimed. But she could say no more, for, bursting into tears, she sobbed violently and almost hysterically, from excess of agitation.

"Oh, Clara! my own, own Clara," cried Lexington, in agitation scarcely less vehement than her own, "have I indeed been torturing you while believing that I was only torturing myself? Clara, have you really loved me? and is it possible you can love me still?"

"Yes, yes, I have! it is possible. Believe all that you wish to believe respecting my affection for you. But never let me see you look so pale again."

Lexington was not the sort of man to fall at a lady's feet, nor was Clara the sort of woman to expect it. Nay, if either party had knelt, it would have been probably the lady, rather than the gentleman. For there was something in the noble, thoughtful, dignified countenance of Arthur, now that emotions, which at length had got the victory, were written on it, which affected Clara to a degree that left her little power over herself.

That countenance that she had studied with such hopeless, yet such enduring love, for so large a portion of her life, to see it, as she did now, pale as death, and telling with such solemn power of elo-

quence the overpowering feelings of the soul within—feelings inspired by her, who had almost petrified her own heart with the belief that he looked upon her with indifference. There was something in this transition that entirely subdued her, and she looked at him with tenderness as undisguised, as it was unfeigned, while the tears continued to flow copiously from her beautiful eyes.

At that moment Lexington saw, and felt, the whole truth. He saw and felt that he had been torturing her, as bitterly as he had been torturing himself. He saw and felt that he had dimmed the bright morning of her life by making her endure the gnawing grief produced by believing that where she had bestowed her precious love, she had met no love in return. And deep within his soul sank the vow which he breathed as, taking her marble-cold hands in his, he exclaimed, “Oh! my Clara! May I cease to live when I cease to contribute to thy happiness!—Oh! listen to me while I swear, not only to love thee for ever and for ever—for thousands might utter that vow, nor run any risk of breaking it, but that thy will shall be my will, thy wishes my wishes, and thy word my law, as long as we both shall live;” and then, first pressing her joined hands to his heart, he threw his arm round her, drew her gently towards him, and impressed love’s first fervent kiss upon her lips.

But to his horror he felt that she was cold and

notionless. She had fainted in his arms. He was rightened; yet he knew that strong emotion will produce such an effect, and as he laid her tenderly on the sofa, and contemplated the statue-like perfection of her features, his alarm was not strong enough to conquer the rapture of happy love with which he hung over her. Removing the curls from her fair forehead, he sprinkled her face copiously from a glass of water that had been placed on the table for her drawing, and then watched with tender, but patient anxiety for those dear eyes to open, wherein he hoped again to read that pure, confiding avowal of love, which had just converted the most desponding, to the most triumphant state of existence. The shock occasioned by the cold water speedily produced its usual effect. Clara shuddered, and opened her eyes. She opened them and looked at Lexington; but all the soft beaming light which they had seemed to emit but a moment before, was gone. She no longer gazed upon him with that innocent look of unchecked love, which had so lately warmed him into new life. The whole expression of her face was changed; the brow was contracted as if by pain, or painful thought, and she placed her hand before her eyes, as if to hide him from her sight.

"Are you ill, my beloved?" he said, anxiously hanging over her. "Shall Hannah, shall your aunts come to you?"

The only answer was a heavy sigh. Clara turned

away her head, pressing it against the back of the sofa, and exclaimed: "Leave me! leave me!"

Lexington now became seriously alarmed. He began to think, that in his averseness to permit any one to witness the sacred emotions of such a heart as Clara's, he had made light of an indisposition which might have more serious consequences than he had anticipated, and he rapidly and violently rang the bell.

Hannah and her assistant were in the room in a moment, and Miss Elizabeth appeared immediately afterwards.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the latter, "what has happened? Mr. Lexington! My dear sir! How long have you been returned from foreign parts? I did not know you were come home. Dear me! dear me! what can have happened to our darling niece! What is it, Mr. Lexington? Can you explain to me what is the matter?"

"I think, my dear Miss Jenkins," replied Arthur, "that if you would open the windows, and perhaps give her some stimulant—a little sal volatile, or something of that sort, you would find that the faintness would go off."

"Indeed I shall not choose to trust to myself, Mr. Lexington, in what concerns the health, and perhaps the life of Clara," replied Miss Jenkins. "I shall send for Mr. Simmons directly. I never saw her in this way before, and I confess that I am a good deal frightened."

But before this resolution had been acted upon, Clara raised herself from her recumbent position, and though still very pale, she spoke with apparent composure as she said: "I really beg your pardon, my dear aunt, and Mr. Lexington's also; but I was overcome by a sensation of faintness for a moment; and whenever this happens, people always tell you that you ought to lie down. That is all, I assure you."

Lexington whose face was almost as colourless as her own, looked at her with great anxiety, but her aunt seemed perfectly satisfied.

"Thank God, my dear, that it is no worse," she said. "If that is all, I think the best thing you could do would be to take a turn in the garden. You may go back, Hannah, and you too, Betty, to the ironing-board. And now I have got over my fright," she added, "I must shake hands with you, Mr. Lexington. You are welcome back to Comp-ton, sir. How long have you been returned?"

"I returned last night, Miss Jenkins," he replied, his eye still anxiously directed towards Clara.

"I cannot compliment you much upon your good looks," resumed Miss Jenkins. "But, perhaps, you found the long journey too fatiguing for you?"

Never, perhaps, did the civility of an old lady obtain a suitable return with a more painful effort from a young gentleman, than it now cost Arthur

Lexington, as he replied. "Yes, ma'am; it was very fatiguing."

But never, perhaps, was the mind of a young man in a more painful state of alarm and confusion than was his at that moment. That some obstacle, some difficulty, which to Clara's mind seemed fatal, had rushed across her memory, to blight the hopes of happiness which they had both seemed to hail with equal joy, seemed certain; and, notwithstanding all his long-studied self-command, he felt as if he could not endure the suspense occasioned by the presence of the worthy Miss Elizabeth much longer.

Clara, perhaps, was aware that some such feeling of impatience was natural, for she said, "If Mr. Lexington will give me his arm, I will try your recipe, aunt."

"Do, my dear, do!" replied the old lady, kindly adding, "but I shall not let you go up-stairs, Clara, for your cloak and bonnet, nor shall I let you go out without them. Hannah shall be here with them in a moment."

Miss Elizabeth closed the door behind her as she spoke, and then, without an instant of further delay, Clara said, "For one short forgetful moment, Arthur Lexington, I fancied that the greatest happiness which this world could bestow lay before me. But a hateful, a fatal recollection, makes me feel that I am not worthy of you. To explain this to you is impossible: I am solemnly bound to secrecy

on the subject. To become your wife without telling you all that has happened to me since we parted is equally impossible. To break my promise were a sin deep enough to forfeit your love. Think of me no more. Doubtless, there is some good reason, though we see it not, why our past wishes and our new-born hopes should not be gratified. God bless you, Mr. Lexington! I have no longer any great business in society, and am not therefore likely to cross your path often; but it will be kind and merciful in you if you try to avoid me."

The heavy step of old Hannah was heard upon the stairs.

"I will ask but one question, Clara," cried the astonished and miserable young man: "Are your aunts acquainted with this fatal secret?"

"They are," she replied; "but, like me, they are bound not to disclose it."

At this moment Hannah, loaded with the bonnet, cloak, boa, muff, and walking-shoes of Clara, appeared at the door, and the unfortunate Arthur turned away towards the window, to conceal a degree of wretchedness which he could scarcely believe reasonable, though he felt it to be real. That any thing could have occurred during his absence which could affect his sentiments towards Miss Maynard, or lessen his wish to call her his wife, he felt to be impossible; but how to prove this to her, if she persisted in refusing to converse with him, he knew not; and there he stood, looking out upon the gar-

and the completely devoted to persons like Cass had parted the road and that Miss Elizabeth Jenkins had entered it. The resolution was taken in a instant that he would let this voice say. — Cass thought she had better be brief and perhaps she is right in this. As I thought, I may have the pleasure of seeing you now you are under your journey. I suppose you will have found it very disagreeable, particularly in some winter weather etc.

Miss Jenkins' and Elizabeth who thought it a shame to allow Cass to remain so long in the room. — Miss Jenkins, who had been the first to enter in the privacy of the room, while I make a discourse to you, thought it would have been wise. I thought, if I had not been so late, I might have done, and have avoided the necessity of this letter. I am so curious in relation to the state of your health, and my interest was a consequence of the state of the state in which she has been so long. For this day, my dear Miss Jenkins, my resolution has failed me. You are not the first to whom I have betrayed my long-kept secret. I have betrayed it also to her, and she has confessed it to her. Miss Jenkins you must forgive us both. She has admitted that my constant love, in disguise as it has been, has, nevertheless, not been betrayed. I need not dwell upon the joy which this truth gave me; but, at the very moment when I had myself possessed of a happiness which nothing but death could destroy, some fatal

recollection seemed to cross her mind, and she declared she never could be mine. Having heard her solemnly avow her love for me, I cannot—it is wholly impossible that I should—believe her to be actuated by caprice, or any other unworthy motive. I have known her too long and too well; and even these words, dreadful as they were, would not have left me without hope, had she not added, that the cause which must for ever separate us was a secret which she was bound never to disclose and she added, that her aunts also were bound by the same promise as herself. The only possible interpretation which suggests itself, Miss Jenkins, is that some enemy (though I knew not that I had one) must have spoken evil of me, under the base shield of secresy. If this be so, Miss Jenkins, do you not feel that I shall have been most cruelly used? Do you not feel that, in common justice to me, the person, be it whom it may, who has raised this barrier between us, ought to be informed, that the promise from you, which he so basely exacted, is rescinded, and that you no longer feel yourself bound by it.”

The features of Miss Elizabeth Jenkins were by no means very flexible, nor in any way deserving the epithet of *expressive*; nevertheless, any one who had watched her during the time that Mr. Lexington was thus addressing her, must have discovered that she had felt well pleased as she listened to his confession of love for her niece; distressed when he

named the obstacle which divided them, but as stern and fixed as fate, when he hinted at the possibility that any individual of her race could rescind a promise given.

The necessity which the worthy lady felt of being firm, in order to preserve in unimpeached purity the honour of her noble ancestry, sustained her courage under the painful necessity of refusing to remove the only obstacle which prevented the dear ill-treated niece whose affair with Vidal had gone so very near their hearts from being married after all, completely to her own satisfaction!

But this necessity did, indeed, sustain her very effectively, for she replied with all the dignity of an empress, "Impossible, Mr. Lexington! Utterly, entirely, and for ever impossible, that any daughter or grand-daughter of Lady Arabella Jenkins should break her pledged word. It is, indeed, most unlucky, most unfortunate, my dear Mr. Lexington, that such a promise should ever have been asked for, or ever given, but it is now too late to think of that. The promise was asked for and was given. All I can say in the way of consolation is, that although Clara with her great beauty might have expected a better match in point of money, there is no one to whom I should have seen her married with more satisfaction than the son of our excellent old friend, Colonel Lexington."

"Do you call that consolation, Miss Jenkins?" cried Arthur, impatiently. "Is it not adding, on

the contrary, to the almost incredible hardship of my situation. I ask you not to break your promise, Miss Jenkins, strange and mysterious as your manner, and that of Clara also, is upon the subject, this mighty secret, let it be what it may, cannot by possibility make any difference in my wishes or my feelings. Oh! tell your Clara, tell her, my dear, kind friend, that you give your consent to our marriage, and that for the secret I care not a rush about it. I have known her too long and too well for any mystery of that kind to create a shadow of uneasiness in my mind. Will you tell her this, my dearest Miss Jenkins?"

"Yes, indeed, I will," replied the old lady, eagerly. "And upon my word, I don't see any good reason at all why this unlucky promise of ours should make any difference. I don't see why you and Clara should not be married, just as if nothing of the kind had happened, and I will go and tell her so directly."

Lexington blessed her a thousand times over, he said, for her generous kindness, and kissing her hand as she left the room, implored her to let him remain in the house till Clara would consent to see him again, if only for a moment.

"To be sure, to be sure, my dear Mr. Arthur! nothing can be more natural! and after all I don't see any reason, as I said before, why every thing should not go on just as smoothly as if Clara had not been so foolish as to tell you any thing about it."

Never, perhaps, was a gentleman's faith in the unimpeachable worth of the woman he loved put to a much severer trial than was that of Arthur on this occasion. But it was not shaken for an instant, though every word uttered by the lady's aunt was well calculated to suggest almost every species of disagreeable suspicion.

Had he, indeed, studied the character of Miss Elizabeth, as long, and as sedulously as he had done that of her niece, he would not have needed the entire faith which he had placed in the latter in order to convince him that all was right; for, in fact, nothing but the simple integrity of her own heart prevented the worthy lady from perceiving that every other word she spoke was calculated to produce all sorts of strange suspicions in the mind of Lexington.

But in truth it never, for a moment, entered her head that it was possible any suspicion of ill-conduct could rest against Clara, and, therefore, very naturally flattered herself that the little embarrassment which this mention of a secret had occasioned, would speedily pass away, and that all would go well.

In about ten minutes after she had left Arthur, she returned to him, with Clara on her arm.

"Another time, my dear children," she said, entering the room, and shutting the door behind her, "another time I shall have no sort of objection to leaving you alone, as it is quite natural that you

should wish me to do, but you must let me stay with you a little while now, that I may assist you, my dear Mr. Arthur, in trying to bring Clara to reason. For though she has consented to come down, because I told her that you would stay in the parlour till she did, she still seems to have some foolish notions about your not liking this promise."

"Spare me all discussion on this point, Mr. Lexington," said Clara, while tears started to her eyes, "and do me the justice to believe that it is as much for the sake of your delicacy, as my own, that I refuse to become your wife, so long as we shall feel ourselves bound in honour to abide by a promise which envelopes my conduct, during the time you have been abroad, in mystery. You must understand this feeling, and you must acknowledge in your heart that you ought to yield to it."

Arthur did understand it; but it was in vain that he pleaded the intimate knowledge of her which made his doing so certain, as a reason why it was perfectly unnecessary that any such idle scruples should separate them. All that could be won from Clara was a promise that she would endeavour to obtain a release from this engagement, that if she obtained it, the secret history of her adventures should be disclosed to him, and that it should then be left for him to decide whether their dream-like engagement of a moment, should be renewed or not.

"And when," cried Arthur, divided between

admiration of her steadfast firmness, and despair at its cruel effect upon their mutual happiness, "when is this attempt to propitiate the mercy of your tyrant to be made?"

"I know not," replied Clara; "at present it is impossible, and it is for this reason, that I implore you, Arthur, to submit to my earnest wish, that for the present we should not meet. Even with this privation, my dear friend, we are surely happier than before it was necessary."

"Happier!" cried poor Lexington. "Oh! how can I deny, or how can I admit it? But I cannot, I will not remain here, Clara; I will not disobey you by intruding on your presence. Can I answer for myself, while within a ten minutes' walk of your dwelling? I shall return to Paris, Clara; dare I hope that you will write to me?"

"When I have such tidings to send, as may justify my assuming so dear a privilege," replied Clara, vainly endeavouring to restrain her tears.

"Oh! Clara! Clara!" he exclaimed, "are you sure, are you very sure that you are right in thus risking the happiness that is within our grasp?"

"I risk it for the moment, in the hope of insuring it for ever," she replied. "Oh, Arthur! so many years of doubt and fear as we have passed ought not to end in mystery."

"Farewell, Clara! farewell! Were you less an angel, I should be less a wretch. But I feel that you deserve to be obeyed, let it cost me what it

may. Farewell, Miss Jenkins, I can never forget your kindness ; and now I will but pass into your garden to say farewell to my ever kind friend Miss Anne, and then a few hours will again see me on my way to France."

It is needless to rehearse all the particulars of the interview which ensued between Arthur Lexington and Miss Anne Jenkins. Miss Anne always seemed proud to confess that Arthur was a great favourite with her, and she did not receive his sadly sounding farewell, without pleading the rights of lang-syne friendship for investigating the cause of it. He immediately related to her all that had passed, upon which she made the following remarkable speech, which is the only one that I think it necessary to give at full length and verbatim: " Dear me ! then I was right after all. Only to think of it, and Elizabeth never would believe me because she said that if it were so, you would be sure to speak out."

She paused for half a moment, during which Arthur held out his hand preparatory to saying farewell, but instead of taking it, she said, " Stop, Arthur, I don't remember saying one single word, good or bad, or indifferent, when poor dear Clara related to Elizabeth and me all that had happened to her. I know she said that she had made a promise to keep it all a secret, and she desired that we would promise too ; and Elizabeth said, in her very proudest way, that she had no inclination whatever to refuse her request, because she thought the less that was said

the better on such a subject, 'and therefore,' said she, 'I DO PROMISE.' But I said no such thing, Mr. Lexington, though I think it likely enough that Elizabeth, and perhaps poor dear Clara, too, may fancy I did ; for my sister Elizabeth generally does take it for granted, that what she says, I say, and in the matter of agreeing with her, and never having any disputes, she is quite right. But there was no danger of a dispute in this business, and—"

"And, therefore, my dearest Miss Anne, you are at liberty to release us from the misery with which this rash promise seemed to threaten us," said Lexington, breaking in upon her longsome narrative with uncontrollable impatience.

"To be sure I am," she replied, "and I thank God for it, my dear Mr. Arthur; and now you shall hear all about it, as plain and exact as I can tell it."

And Miss Anne kept her word in this, really giving a very respectably clear account of Mr. Vidal's advances; of the great estimation in which he was held by the whole neighbourhood ; of his proposal, and acceptance ; of his presumptuous request for a private marriage, from fear of offending his distinguished relatives ; Clara's absolute refusal to comply with this; and finally, of Mr. Vidal's earnest request, that they should none of them ever divulge the fact of his having proposed to her, as it would draw upon him the ruinous displeasure of his grand relations.

"You know my sister Elizabeth, and Clara

also, well enough to understand how they both were likely to receive such a request as this," continued Miss Anne, with a good deal of the family dignity. "We were some of us very likely to wish for the honour of publishing the compliment he had paid us—and my only reason for not promising like my sister, was, that nobody put the question to me particularly, and I was so astonished at his conduct altogether, that I was much more inclined to listen, than to speak. And now it turns out very lucky, doesn't it, Mr. Lexington?"

"God bless you for your silence then, and for your speaking now," cried Lexington, suddenly raising the startled lady's hand to his lips, and then as suddenly springing past her, he regained the upstairs sitting-room, with fewer steps than most persons would have deemed necessary, and throwing open the door, found himself again in the presence of Clara, and her aunt Elizabeth.

Gladly, indeed, would Clara have retreated to her own room after the melancholy exit of her banished lover, but her habitual respect for her aunt constrained her to remain; for no sooner was Mr. Lexington out of sight, than she laid her hand on that of her suffering niece, and said, "Sit down, Clara! It is better that you should remain with me, my dear, during the first natural outbreak of sorrow at parting with a lover so every way deserving your regard. I wish also to strengthen your noble resolve in the matter of this promise," et cætera,

et cætera, the listening to which had been a grievous penance, but she was amply rewarded for her patient endurance of it, by catching sight of Arthur's radiant expression of happiness several minutes earlier than she could have done had she been less dutiful.

It is unnecessary to enter into the details of the conversation that followed. Arthur's only sensation, at learning from the lips of Clara herself how nearly he had lost her, was thankfulness unbounded that it was Vidal, and no other, who had been his rival.

There is at least one advantage attending marriages where settlements are not likely to cover an innumerable amount of folios. Time, who sometimes creeps very cruelly when this is the case, now threatened no such tormenting slowness. It was necessary that Lexington should go to town for the despatch of such business as was, inevitably, to be done; but he promised to return so soon, that the old ladies of the Town Head House declared that there would be a great deal more to do there than could possibly be performed within the time specified; an opinion in which Hannah most cordially agreed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE more dignified proceedings of Mr. Clementson in this same matter of settlements were likely to take proportionably more time. His estate had never yet been entailed; but he now took it into his head that he should prefer its being so.

When he announced this to Mary, he added, looking in her grave young face with some anxiety,

“This may, perhaps, make the preparing the deeds of settlement a rather longer business, Mary. Shall you be vexed at this, dearest?”

“Vexed, papa? Oh! dear no,” she replied, with by far the gayest look she had given him since their arrival in town.

“Well, then, my dear, I will mention it to Mr. Vidal as soon as he comes. He said he should be here immediately after breakfast. But he tells me he never can get a breakfast in London before eleven o’clock, and that eats terribly deep into the morning. However, we shall have time enough for it all, I dare say.”

Considering that Mr. Clementson was one of the most simple-minded of mortals, his head was most unnaturally full of plots, and plans, and schemes, and crotchets, at this time; yet with all this working within him, he knew perfectly well all the time that he could *do nothing*. For was not his Mary ENGAGED to marry Vidal? And he himself, who had never forfeited his word to man, woman, or child, was he to be guilty of an act of gross dishonour now, because he had taken it into his head to change his mind, and, without rhyme or reason, to take a dislike to a man to-day, for whom he had felt a fever of admiration yesterday? Besides, what right had he to suppose that Mary was as great a fool as himself? Had he not tried her in every way he could think of, in order to find out if she, too, had got tired of him? And though from the age of two years old, up to the present hour, she had never kept a secret from him in her life, had he been able to make her utter a word about being sorry that she had promised to marry this Vidal? To all these tormenting questions his honest spirit was constrained to answer NO, and the consequence was that he actually began to grow thin, and look pale; and for that matter so did Mary, too; but Mrs. Morris, to whom the squire pointed this out, before she went away to the new situation which she had secured for herself before they left Dalbury, Mrs. Morris assured him that he need not be un-

easy about it, for that was very often the case when young ladies first changed the air of the country for that of the town.

Did ever anxious father receive so provoking an answer? If she had but said that Miss Mary seemed to have something on her spirits! If she had but hinted that she looked unhappy in her mind, there would have been some comfort in that! But no! every thing and every body conspired to torment him; and from considering himself, and, indeed, from being, one of the very happiest, and most prosperous old gentlemen in the world, he was rapidly progressing towards the conviction that he was exactly the reverse. And then there were so many minor things that conspired to vex him! Mrs. Morris, as he knew before he came to town, had found a good situation, and was to go to it a few days after they arrived; so he had made up his mind to that; and when the worthy lady shed a few very genuine tears, as she thanked him at the moment of parting, for his unceasing and uniform kindness to her, he thanked God, as he turned away to conceal the tear in his own eye, that he had been able to be kind to somebody, before he lost his spirits and turned cross, for now he did not feel as if he should ever be good-natured or kind to any body again.

However, he felt glad that poor Mademoiselle Panache was not going yet, because he might be able, merely from habit, to be still a little tolerably

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dismal dwelling that ever a man got into—and as for the table, he had never seen any thing that deserved the name of a dinner since he turned his back upon poor old Dalbury!—All this was hateful and detestable in no small degree. But was there not something else ten thousand times more hateful and detestable still?

When Mr. Vidal made his daily entry into the drawing-room before dinner, with his gracefully assured step, his perfumed toilet, his authorised air of drawing up or down blinds, thrusting back a table here, or rolling it forward there, and, worst of all, the look of licensed freedom with which he seated himself close to Mary, lent on the back of her chair, and whispered in her ear, was not that ten million times more irritating and hateful to him than all the misfortunes and annoyances that had ever happened to him in his whole life put together?

And yet the poor squire thought he could have borne it all, if his Mary had but looked as she used to do. But she did not. There was no mistake there. Mary did not look as she used to do. All the sunshine (to steal an admirable phrase) was out of her. She smiled when her father spoke to her. She smiled when Mr. Vidal spoke to her, and she smiled, too, when Lucy Dalton was kind enough to leave her mother for a little while, and come to call upon her.

But for all that Mary Clementson looked no more

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This was very prettily said, but it did not convey a very correct idea to the mind of Miss Clementson of the elegant, though somewhat too showy, little apartment, which Miss Dalton and Mr. Vidal, between them, had found and embellished at Brompton. And the consequence of the indistinctness of this description was the arrival at the said Brompton villa of a pretty little upright pianoforte, as a present from Mary to her old friend.

“Imagine her fancying that I could live without a pianoforte, my dear Theodore!” exclaimed Lucy to her lover at his next visit.

“May she never come nearer the mark in any of her surmises, my angel!” replied Vidal. “It will, at any rate, be as well for you to play upon a piano of your own, as upon a hired one. I will send back the other to-morrow, and it shall not be my fault, dearest, if you do not often find yourself supplied with various useful, as well as ornamental, commodities from the same quarter.”

There was also another circumstance connected with the domestic economy of Miss Dalton, with which her *ci-devant* patroness was not made acquainted; Lucy gave her no details as to the portion of the house allotted to the use of her interesting mother. She did not, as it seemed, think it necessary to mention that as Mr. Vidal liberally contributed to the payment for the lodgings, she, Lucy, considered it highly proper that the drawing-room floor should be kept for his use, and never intruded upon, except by especial permission.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE first agreeable sensation experienced by the squire of Dalbury after his arrival in London (save and except the sight of his young cousin, Richard Herbert, "beloved in vain"), was occasioned by hearing the name of Mr. Arthur Lexington announced, and seeing that long-known and highly esteemed individual enter the drawing-room.

Nothing could be more cordial than their mutual greetings, and on the part of Mr. Clementson they were perhaps the more so, from the unusual sensation of low spirits from which he was suffering. The sight of an old friend, and that friend from Compton, was perhaps the greatest treat he could have had, as matters stood with him.

"You will dine with us, my dear Lexington?" said the good squire, earnestly. "You *must* dine with us, Arthur," he repeated, upon seeing an expression of hesitation on the countenance of the young man.

"You are very kind, sir," replied Arthur, "but

I am afraid that I shall not be able to have this pleasure."

Now the fact was, that Arthur Lexington had not many more acquaintances in the huge metropolis of England than the squire of Dalbury himself, and that, when refusing to dine with him, he doomed himself to that very superlative misery, a solitary dinner at a lodging-house; but the idea of meeting Mr. Vidal was extremely disagreeable to him, and knowing the position in which that highly favoured personage stood in the Clementson family, he could not reasonably hope to escape that honour, if he consented to dine with them. But there was an air of such genuine vexation on the squire's countenance as he listened to this refusal, that Arthur could not stand it, and he immediately corrected his answer, by adding, "unless indeed you are unfashionable enough to dine before seven o'clock, for I have promised to meet a friend in the pit of the opera at nine."

"Seven o'clock, my dear fellow?" replied the squire. "We shall dine at six precisely. How did you come to think I should be such a contemptible *time-server* as to alter my dinner hour because I am in London?"

"Then at six o'clock, my dear sir, I will be with you."

And now the squire ventured to wish him joy, although the news of his intended marriage had only reached him by a confidential communication

from Mary, to whom Clara had written without reserve on the subject.

But though Arthur coloured as he acknowledged the congratulation, he by no means appeared to think that it was a subject which required mystery, for he immediately entered upon the pleasant theme with all the unaffected avowal of happiness that long acquaintance permitted, and as they were still *tête-à-tête* he not only took the liberty of declaring that he considered himself as the happiest man in the world, but freely opened all his future plans to the kind-hearted squire, who listened to him with the sincerest interest. "Our good aunts," he said, "have proposed that we should live with them at the Town Head House, and when I have moved my books into the morning-room that looks into the garden, and which the kind-hearted sisters have offered to give up to Clara and me for our private sitting-room, the residence will be every thing I could desire; yet I cannot help wishing, my dear Mr. Clementson, that I had been more decidedly bent upon a profession in my early days, that I might now offer my lovely Clara a home instead of accepting one from her."

"That is all nonsense, Arthur, about not liking to *accept* a home, as you call it, from your wife. If a young woman happens to have a home that she likes, I have always had a great partiality to that sort of arrangement, though I won't pretend to say, either, that it ought to make a man forget

every day of her life, and he is such a confirmed miser as never to say to any thing I think you will be very happy and comfortable together."

Arthur then asked a few inquiries from the young nephew of Mrs. de la Haye, and how he had found her in court, and whether there was any chance of her doing her duty by leaving her only relative a part of her wealth, to which last question Arthur only replied by shaking his head, the two gentlemen parted with a promise on the part of the younger one to be punctual to the hour of dinner.

And Arthur was punctual, and accordingly found himself, as most punctual people do, a little too early, for there was no one in the drawing-room. Mary joined him, however, in a minute or two, and the squire made his appearance immediately after, overflowing with apologies for being so late, and protesting that it was the awkwardness of his shoes, and of every thing in it, which was the cause of it. But long and tedious was the interval before Mr. Vidal, who, at the first hour of their arrival, had already expressed a lover-like hope that he as daily guest, made his appearance.

Mr. Vidal had too just an appreciation of the prize he was about to win, to permit any want of negligence of demeanour to tarnish the ardour of the devotion which he so fully expressed for Mary.

Indeed, did he perform his part, as well as he undertook to do, that the

true-hearted little heiress firmly believed him to be very strongly attached to her; and whenever she felt a sensation of distaste creep over her, as he displayed all the innumerable graces of his person and mind, she almost shuddered at the baseness of her own ingratitude. She had for some time made it decidedly the first object of her existence to persuade herself that she did not, nor ever had, liked any body else so well, and having also, and with much less effect, persuaded herself that nobody else had ever liked her so well, she was growing into a very firm belief that (excepting towards her father) nature had not been pleased to bestow upon her the great blessing of an affectionate heart, and she had no doubt that it was owing to this lamentable deficiency that she could not control a strong feeling of anger and indignation towards her matchless lover every time he made her father wait for dinner.

Never, perhaps, was this feeling more strong than on the present occasion. She fancied her father looked pale, and that his voice was less clear and firm than usual. She knew he had been with his lawyer; she thought that he was over-fatigued, and that this waiting for his dinner would make him ill.

But it was in vain that she entreated that he would wait no longer for Mr. Vidal. What the squire wanted in affection towards his elected son-in-law, he made up now, and always, in punctilious observance. He positively refused to have the dinner ordered, but he could not resist pulling out his

watched about every two minutes, nor could he reasonably avoid making an apology to Arthur every time he did so, for keeping him waiting, after so strongly urging him to punctuality ; so that, altogether, the interval was not only a long, but a tedious one. At length, however, the elegant dinner appeared, and had the trio who awaited him been as feelingly alive to the graces of person and manner as Mr. Vidal was himself, they would all have speedily forgotten that the hour was nearer seven than six.

Politeness and smiling were the apologies that he seemed to lay at the feet of the squire, as he offered him his hand; and he looked into the eyes of Mary with an expression of deprecating and tender penitence, that she felt deserved a smile in return. But towards Mr. Lexington he indulged himself in an air of haughty superiority, which gave that gentleman a painfully strong inclination to kick him.

The dinner, however, despite the squire's grumbling, was a very good one, and passed off better than the hour which had preceded it, but that the good squire was out of spirits, or in more expressive phrase, out of sorts, was evident to each of his three companions, and to his graceful son-in-law rather alarmingly so. He almost blasphemed against his lovely Lucy, in his heart, for having so long detained him, and mentally resolved that he would never yield to her fascinations again at so dangerous an hour, at least not till the time arrived when it

would be his turn to knit his brows and look savage, if any thing disagreeable crossed his path.

Mary did not sit long after the cloth was removed, and it was evident on that day, that not even good claret can always have charms to keep the gentlemen of England in the dining parlour, for they followed her into the drawing-room almost immediately; and then came the coffee, and then Lexington was beginning to take his leave, when the Dalbury butler came up to him, and said in a half whisper, "There is a woman down stairs, Mr. Lexington, in deep mourning, who seems very much agitated and fatigued, and she declares that she must speak to you instantly. Shall I show her up into the back drawing-room, sir?"

The squire, who was speaking to Arthur at the moment the servant addressed him, immediately replied for him in the affirmative, and the man disappeared, before the puzzled Lexington had time to say, as he was going to do, that he would save him the trouble of being her usher, by going down to her.

He said it, however, to Mr. Clementson, and would have left the room accordingly, but the squire laid his hand upon his arm, saying, "Nonsense, my dear Arthur; those confounded little narrow passages, without any stove in them, have a draught like a keyhole."

He had scarcely finished these words, when the woman described by the butler rushed into the

room, and instantly fixing her eyes upon Lexington, flew to him, and seized hold of his arm.

"Martha!" he exclaimed, with emotion, "my poor aunt is dead?"

"Yes, sir, yes," replied the shaking old woman, "she died a natural death, and I closed her eyes, and now I have got to you, Mr. Arthur, and performed my promise, I don't care how soon I die too."

As she spoke these words she drew out, not without some difficulty, from the depths of a pocket that appeared to be concealed under her upper garment, a paper packet, which she placed in the hands of Lexington.

"Sit down, my good woman, sit down," said the squire, who observed that she was not very well able to stand. She obeyed, and Arthur drew a chair, and sat down by her.

"What is this paper, Martha," he demanded, in a voice that was less steady than it would have been if no such person as Clara Maynard had existed.

"It is the last will and testament of your father's sister, Mr. Lexington, properly drawn, and properly executed, of which I am a living witness, as well as a signed one, for I stood beside her, though not without fear for my life, during the whole time. By that will, sir, you are put in possession of the whole of your late aunt's property. You are the only person named in it, for the lawyer told

her that if she left the legacy, which she wished to do, kind soul, to me, I could not be a witness. And as a witness was wanted, my name, of course, is not mentioned."

"And her husband, Martha?" said Lexington; endeavouring to bear this great change of fortune with becoming composure; "did he again break his word, and again treat her harshly?"

"Break his word? the villain! He would now, I believe in my heart, be on his trial for the murder of her, if I had not disposed of his careful cookeries in a way that he did not intend. You had not been out of Paris an hour, Mr. Arthur, before he began his manœuvrings. But, nevertheless, I was beforehand with him. I knew him too well before, to trust him then. I made my deposition as to facts past, and facts expected, before the proper tribunal, and I got a promise of help in a way that the villain was not likely to guess. The French people are queer in some things, but they are not all of them so bad as M. Marathone, and they have a great fancy for out-witting people by the police, so that the gentleman that presided took my scheme as kindly as if I had been offering him a party at pleasure. I told him that I thought my mistress too ill to live long, but that I thought my master might be apt to think that, nevertheless, she would not die soon enough—and, besides saying this, I explained to him fully (for I have been long enough in the country to make myself understood), all

about the will he had got, that she made years ago, and all about the one she wanted to make then, if she could but find an opportunity. To which the magistrate replied that he would take care to find her an opportunity, and so he did; for the very next day after you went, a party of the police came to the house, and desired to see M. Marathone; and into the drawing-room they were shown with all respect, of course; and then the chief among them said, as one of the servants told me afterwards, that he was sorry to trouble monsieur, but that they had received information concerning madame, which rendered it absolutely necessary that she should be privately examined on an affair of great consequence. To which M. Marathone replied that he infinitely regretted to say that his admirable lady was not in a state of mind to make any examination available. And to that the agent of police replied that their orders were too absolute to be set aside by any such accident as that. If her testimony was found unworthy of credit, of course none would be given to it; but that was a question quite beyond his power of jurisdiction. His orders were precise, and he must precisely execute them. This settled the business. The four individuals, one of which was a highly respectable *notaire*, and another his clerk, both looking exceedingly well at their ease in uniform, were shown into the bed-room of my poor mistress. She was miserably ill, and so weak that I was obliged to make her swallow a strong cordial draught, before she

could explain her wishes. The, room, meanwhile was strictly guarded by a real policeman, and every one turned out of it, except myself. The business was quickly got through, for the will, as you will find, Mr. Lexington, is a very concise and a very short one. But I have no doubt, sir, but you will find it complete also. The paper was duly signed by my mistress, by me, and by the chief of the police party, who appeared to be a very respectable person, and who, at the request of the *notaire*, gave me his full address on this card, Mr. Arthur, in case any difficulty should arise as to proving the will. The lawyer also gave me his address, in order that you might find him if you wished it. All this being completed, the whole party took their departure without holding any further communication with M. Marathone, taking my mistress's will with them. There is no use in detaining you now, Mr. Lexington, with an account of my master's conduct afterwards. I think he was a good deal alarmed, but I could never hear or see any thing, either in him or his servants, to lead me to think that they suspected the real object of the police in coming to the house. From what I could make out, it rather seemed that they suspected that something of a new and dangerous nature had been going on between M. Marathone and some of his intimate associates. But however this may be, I saw enough to terrify me about my poor mistress. M. Marathone frequently

came into the room." But though he did not say much, it was easy to see that his presence was terrible to her, for she shook, poor lady, as she lay on her death-bed, from head to foot; and it was plain that he had obtained some very dreadful influence over her mind. My own belief is that he had got it in his head to poison her. But there were two things that stopped him. The one was my watchfulness, which he must have seen before he entered our sleep, and the other was the rapid sinking of my poor mistress. For it seemed as if she had only lived till she had eased her conscience by taking care of her own flesh and blood, for from that day it was plain enough to see that she was drawing near her end.

"As soon as she was released, poor soul, and I had seen her in her coffin, I took myself off, for I did not consider myself safe, nor the precious will either, till both one and the other was on this side of the water. Besides which I promised her, almost in her last moments, that I would do her errand without wasting an hour; and I have kept my word. Mr. Armand, for no sooner did I get to London than I set off for Compton; and when I found you were not there, I got your address here, and back again I came as fast as the railroad could bring me; and learning from your own servant, at your lodgings, that you were here, I got into a cab and followed you."

This long narrative was given slowly and dis-

tinctly, and not without some appearance of consciousness on the part of the narrator, that she had done "some service" to the individual she addressed.

While this was going on at the lower part of the principal drawing-room, and at no great distance from the door, Mr. Clementson being seated on a chair close beside Mrs. Squabs, and Lexington opposite to her, Mr. Vidal was making a vast deal of love to Mary in the smaller room, which, in the ordinary London fashion, opened from it with folding doors.

But though the door was wide, and the room not large, the group in the principal apartment were quite concealed from Mary and her adorer, as they stood looking, as it seemed, upon the miniature garden behind the house.

But Mary began to get tired of standing there; she had probably examined with sufficient accuracy all that was to be seen in the dusky garden, and it is possible she might have also felt that her retreat, which was caused by a disinclination to intrude herself on the interview between Mr. Lexington and the person who had asked for him, had afforded as much opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* with her lover as the laws of decorum could permit.

Just, therefore, as Mrs. Squabs had reached the conclusion of her narrative, Miss Clementson said:

"I can let you see now, Mr. Vidal, the cameo you were speaking of yesterday. It is in the next

the ebb, often leads to rocky reefs and ingulphing quicksands.

My hero had very often, during his seven and thirty years of life, found himself placed in embarrassing circumstances, but never before had he found himself embarrassed.

Till this unlucky moment there had ever been a sort of perennial flow of impudence within him, that sprang up like the strong jet of a well-supplied fountain, blinding the eyes of any audacious mortal who ventured to approach sufficiently near to be splashed by it.

But now there seemed to be something wrong in the machinery. He tried to shake off the clinging hug of his venerable relative, but the effort was in vain; and when at length she removed her head from his satin waistcoat, it was only to overwhelm him with questions, which either to answer or not to answer, seemed alike destructive to his hopes.

“And where was it, Luke?” said she “that you betook yourself, my darling boy, when your dear good father died, and left you all that sight of money? My brother, Mr. Lexington, as my dear good mistress your aunt could have told you, was one of the first tailors in London, and I should not think the name of Squabs could be forgotten yet in the city; but that’s neither here nor there. I have never made a boast of my great relations, as Luke can tell you as well as I; for you must remember well, don’t you, Luke, how your good father begged

and prayed of me to come and be made a lady of, when your poor mother died. But no, not I; I stuck true and faithful to my poor mistress, to the very last, and yet, Luke," she added, looking up tenderly into his face, "and yet, Luke, I do remember, too, that I was strongly tempted at one moment to listen to him, and that was when I looked at your dear beautiful face, my darling boy! And so I was again, I won't deny it, when my good mistress gave me leave to come over from France to visit him, dear man, just before he died; for then, to be sure, Luke, you was a young fellow that any aunt might have been proud of, whether she was a servant or not. But how I run on talking myself, without ever getting a word of answer from you, as to where you went to after he died. And who took the business, Luke? You ought to have got a pretty penny for that, for no man could have been doing better than he was, particularly in the waistcoat line. And what foreign country was it you went to, my dear, after you wrote that one only letter that I ever got from you. In that letter you told me you know that you were going to travel for years, and that it would be no good for me to inquire after you at any of the old places, for, that as you did not know where you were going yourself, you could not leave any direction. Where was it, my dearest Luke, that you went to? And what misfortunes was it that you fell into, that have kept you out of sight so long?"

For one short and really terrible moment my hero felt inclined to make a desperate struggle with his destiny; this moment was when he had at length succeeded in releasing himself from the arms of the old woman, for he had then muttered something about her being decidedly mad.

But either she did not hear, or did not understand him, and went on so composedly, and with an air of so very well knowing what she was talking about, that utter despair of escaping from the truth seized upon him, and he suddenly resolved both to avow the correctness of every thing she had spoken, and also to declare that no person of honour could deem him in the slightest degree degraded by his relationship to so excellent a person.

When he had taken this resolution he looked boldly up, and gazed in succession in the face of every one around him. That of his aunt was the last, and to her he said:

“My good aunt, you have always, I know, been exceedingly attached to me, and had not the plans of life which I laid down for myself rendered it inconvenient for me to do so, I should certainly have written to you. As it is, you have, I confess, come upon me rather unexpectedly, and I will not deny that your doing so embarrassed me for a moment. I thank Heaven, however, that I am not a man to be very long or very seriously annoyed by such an accident. There is a good deal of absurdity in it, certainly,” he added, turning with a look of per-

fectly recovered self-possession to Mr. Clementson, "but all my friends, I think, will be ready to testify, that though the flattering success I have found in society might have been sufficient to turn the heads of most men, it has never induced me for a moment to falsify any single circumstance relative to my fortune, or to my actual position. No man has ever heard me call myself rich. No man has ever heard me hint that I was noble. I AM MYSELF, and as such only, unaided by any accidental advantages, I have presented myself to society in this country, and in every other that I have visited. I have never deluded any one. If people of distinction have, at all the courts and throughout every metropolis of Europe. sought my acquaintance with eagerness, and cherished it with great and partial friendship, I certainly cannot accuse myself of fraud on that account."

He ceased, and smiled on Mary with great fondness, as much as to say, "You see, dearest, that the man on whom you have bestowed your heart is worthy of you!"

There was a moment of silence, and then Arthur Lexington said rather drily, and meaning, as it seemed, to answer his concluding words, "Have you not changed your name, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Lexington, I have," replied Vidal. "I had a right, in common with all men, to designate myself by any name I chose. I did not assume a title, sir; because to that distinction I had no right."

I had a reason for changing my name, which, if you wish it, shall be at your service, Mr. Lexington, though I am not bound either in honour or courtesy to render it to any one. My reason for changing my name, Mr. Arthur Lexington, was because my ear, which is a very accurate one, informed me, after many private repetitions of the sounds alternately, that Theodore Vidal had more of euphony than Luke Squabs. If you are of a different opinion, I shall not attempt to contest the point with you. It is possible that you may not be equally sensitive with myself on this point, but in my estimation the possession of a good picture is not more decidedly preferable to the possession of a bad one, than is the privilege of being addressed by a musical name, instead of a discordant one."

Mr. Lexington bowed, and immediately rising, shook hands with Mr. Clementson and Mary, and without again looking towards the *ci-devant* Mr. Luke Squabs, who had delivered the above harangue while leaning in a charming attitude upon the chimney-piece, walked out of the room.

The squire followed him to the head of the stairs, and seizing his hand, wrung it forcibly. "Come to me early to-morrow morning, Lexington," he said. "I want a friend to speak to."

Arthur promised to be with him at any hour he would name.

"Not later than ten, dear Arthur!" returned Mr. Clementson, and having received an assurance from

the young man that he would be punctual, he returned into the drawing-room.

Mary was close to the door, and evidently about to pass through it as he entered.

"You are going, my love," said her father, with a multitude of happy thoughts fluttering at his heart, which most probably would have made him either sing or whistle aloud, had it not been for *one* of a different kind.

"How had he," he asked himself, "any right to suppose that his Mary would be as much delighted at discovering that the elegant Mr. Vidal was a tailor, as he was? How did he know that she would be inclined to dance and sing, because his real name was Luke Squabs?" However, he contrived to give her a very cheering sort of kiss, and then whispered, "Go to bed, now, dearest; but I shall shave rather early to-morrow, Mary. Don't forget that, my dear."

On re-entering the drawing-room, Mr. Clementson found Mr. Vidal still in the same striking attitude by the chimney-piece, and his aunt, whose dress, countenance, attitude, and figure, offered a very picturesque contrast to him, standing on the hearth-rug close beside him.

"You have done my friend, Mr. Lexington, a very praiseworthy service, Mrs. Squabs," said the squire, pronouncing the name with peculiar distinctness, "and he is very grateful to you for it. I must now bid you good night, as I am about to

retire immediately to my own room. But if you wish for any refreshment, or are in want of a carriage to convey you to your lodgings, my servants will be at your orders; and don't fear, my good woman, but that you will hear again, and very satisfactorily too, from Mr. Arthur Lexington. But I believe he was rather in a hurry to get away now. Good night." And then, with a profound bow, he added, "Mr. Luke Squabs, I have the honour, sir, of wishing you also a very good night."

"My dear sir," began the gentleman he thus addressed; but before he could get any further the squire had disappeared, and the aunt and nephew remained *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room.

To Mrs. Martha Squabs this was a real comfort, as she wished for nothing so much as to be able, without making herself ridiculous before company, to kiss the newly-found nephew heartily. In what manner he might have received her caresses it is impossible to say, for at the very moment she was about to offer them, the footman entered the room, and said, "Your cab, ma'am, is waiting at the door. Is there any thing else that you please to want?"

"No, I thank you, young man," replied Mrs. Squabs, "I want nothing at all, I am very much obliged to you." And then, turning to her nephew, she said in accents of the tenderest affection, "Come, my dearest Luke! come along, my own darling nephew! I never thought I should be so happy again, as I am now that I have found you!"

Not even the altered eye of the squire, nor the cold scorn that he had felt settle upon him from that of Lexington, nor the studied avoidance of that of Mary, had given a pang of such bitterness to the heart of Vidal, as the comical glance which the footman gave him, as he listened to these words. He could not stand it at all; his philosophy for the moment was completely overset, and he stalked past him, went down the stairs, and out of the house with the aspect of a man who felt a strong inclination to hang or shoot himself.

"You had better take a glass of wine, ma'am" said the footman, with a very captivating air of politeness.

"Well, then, I won't deny but what I should like to get one," replied Mrs. Squabs, "for, truth to say, I am downright tired and beat by my long day's work."

So the footman, with every demonstration of hospitality, led the way into the dining-parlour, and pointing to one of the recently-vacated chairs, took another himself, and filling two glasses to the brim from a decanter which remained on the table, he drank Mrs. Martha's good health. A plate of biscuits was then pushed towards her, and Peter the footman thinking it a pity that so excellent an opportunity for conversation should be lost, exerted himself to be as agreeable as possible, and, before the good woman had finished her third glass of sherry, Peter knew perfectly well that the indi-

ual known in the family by the name of Mr. Theodore Vidal, and considered as the affianced husband of their beautiful young heiress, was neither more nor less than Luke Squabs, the lawful son of Samuel Squabs, the celebrated tailor of Finsbury-square, and Sarah, his wife.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARY CLEMENTSON did not forget on the following morning that it was the intention of her father to shave early on that day, and accordingly she made rather a more hasty toilet than usual, in order to be in good time to attend upon him.

"There's my darling," said the squire, greeting her more cheerily than he had done for some weeks past. "I don't see but that you are as good a daughter as before you were an engaged woman, my Mary." His daughter looked steadily in his face for a moment, and then turned away her head and smiled: but the squire did not see it, and proceeded to ask her very affectionately how she was.

"Quite well, dear papa," she answered, in a tone that might have satisfied the most anxious parent; "how do you do?"

"Why, I don't feel ill, Mary, at all; and I am happy to see, my love, that you do not look, by many degrees, so languid and poorly as I expected

to see you. I think, my dear, that you must, somehow or other, have had a very tolerably good night."

"Yes, indeed, papa! I believe I slept from the time I lay down, till the time I got up again. Yet, no, that is not true either," she added, with a slight augmentation of colour, "for I remember now that I lay awake thinking for a good while after I got to bed. However, I slept very soundly afterwards."

"Thank God!" said the good squire, fervently, "that is, indeed, a very great comfort, Mary. And as to your laying awake thinking, it certainly would have been very unnatural if you had not, considering all we saw and heard last night. But I have been in a terrible way about it, all night, almost; that is, off and on; for I will not be so false-hearted as to say that all my thoughts respecting this extraordinary discovery were unhappy thoughts. The worst of it was, that I did not know, my darling child, how you might take it. I thought that, probably, it would be a great shock to you."

"You mean the hearing that Mr. Vidal was the son of a tailor, I suppose, papa, don't you?"

"Yes, dearest! A tailor, Mary, may be a very honest man, and the son of a tailor may be a very honest man, too. But, nevertheless, Mary, there are prejudices which would make it very painful

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" I like it, Mar,

I thought, Mary, that you were over head and ears in love with him?"

"Oh! my dear papa, there has been something very wrong and very deceitful in me!" cried Mary, "but I don't know how it has happened. I certainly did not mean to be so very wicked as I now believe I have been. But it was because——"

And then suddenly stopping herself, she added, "But thank Heaven it does not signify now. I never shall be able to make any body understand *why* it happened. But, at least, papa, you may believe me when I tell you that I never was in love with Mr. Vidal at all."

"Then what did Lucy Dalton mean by saying that your health, and, perhaps, your life depended upon your marrying Mr. Vidal?" demanded the squire, sternly.

"Of course poor dear Lucy thought so, papa, as well as you," replied Mary. "And it must have been my fault, and I beg your pardon for it a thousand, thousand times, and I see plainly now, how very wicked it was of me; but it seemed to me at the time that there was nothing else to be done, no other way in the world, that is, of proving that her other suspicion was wrong."

"My dearest Mary!" said the squire, looking at her with painful perplexity, for tears were streaming from her eyes as she spoke, "what is it that you have got upon your mind? You cannot mean

to tell me, my dearest love, that you pretended to be in love with Mr. Vidal without being so?"

Mary hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

"Surely there is some strange mystery in this," said the squire, "and I don't know which way to turn to find it out. Would not any one think, my Mary, to see you crying so, just after our finding out that Mr. Vidal was a tailor, and that the marriage could not go on, would not any one think that you were breaking your heart because you have lost him? And yet if any girl ever spoke true since the world began, it was you, Mary, when you said those dear words, 'I am so very, very glad.' Don't cry so, my darling!" continued the poor squire, throwing his arm round her, and looking very much as if he were going to cry too. "You don't know half how I love you, Mary. I should think no more of giving away my estate to please you, than of throwing a stick into the river for Ponto to play with, but it is sad work, my dear child, going on so, without knowing what there is that I *can* do to make you happy."

"I see it all now," cried Mary; "I have behaved ill from the very beginning!"

"I don't believe it, Mary; I don't believe it," returned her father; "I never saw you behave ill since you were born, and it is not likely that you should begin now. But I do think you would be easier, Mary, if you would tell me what it is you

have got upon your mind. What was *that other suspicion* that Lucy had? And what was it you did to disprove it?"

"I let her believe, and I let you believe too, papa, that I liked Mr. Vidal a great deal better than I ever did like him."

"What? From the very first, Mary? That very first morning after the ball, did you not really like him, and admire him, more then, than any body else in the world?"

"No, papa," replied Mary.

"Then, my dear child, what could have made you say so?" demanded her father, gravely.

"I don't know," she replied, while a burning blush seemed to dry up the tears that still hung upon her cheek. "I suppose it was out of gratitude, because he seemed to like me so much better than any one else did."

"That is talking nonsense, Mary, for every body liked you. But even if you did think so, I should never have expected that your gratitude would have gone so far as to make you tell Lucy Dalton that you were in love with him."

"But I never did tell Lucy Dalton that, papa!" said Mary, smiling through her tears at the idea.

"I suppose, then, my dear, that you have changed your mind so completely, that you have forgotten all about it," said her father; "for I do assure you, Mary, that your friend, Lucy, told me your health and happiness, and, perhaps, your life de-

pendent upon your marrying Mr. Vidal, and that she had found this out from yourself."

"All I can say in reply to that, papa, is that if Lucy really thought so, she was very much mistaken," said Lucy.

"But did you never talk to her about him, my dear?" demanded the squire.

"Yes. I have talked about him very often to Lucy: though I think it would be more correct to say that she talked about him to me, for most certainly it was she, and not I, who always began the subject. However, I do not mean to deny," continued the penitent heiress, "that I did let her think that I admired and liked him more than I really did, though I don't think I ever gave her reason to suppose that I was dying for him, either."

"But why, my dearest Mary, should you have wished to make Lucy Dalton believe that you liked him at all better than you really did?" said her father.

The fair cheeks of Mary again glowed as she replied: "Yes, papa—I know that was very wrong—and I am very much ashamed of it. But at the time I really fancied that I ought to do it, to make her easy: and—and—to remove a very disagreeable suspicion from myself."

"What the suspicion might be, Mary, must, I suppose, for ever remain a secret to me?" said the squire, looking a little vexed; "but you certainly took a very desperate and dangerous method of removing it."

There was something in the tone with which this was spoken, so unlike what she had been used to from her father, that Mary could not bear it; and unmindful of every thing but the longing desire to have perfect confidence restored between them, she exclaimed,

“ Well then, papa, I will tell you what it was, and then you may judge for yourself. You know papa, for I told you of it myself, that Mr. Herbert—that my cousin Richard, I mean, was very much attached to Lucy, and Lucy to him.”

Here the squire curled up his nose in a very particular manner, and snapped his fingers, the meaning of which grimace Mary could by no means understand, but the words “Go on, my dear,” being pronounced the moment after, very kindly, she obeyed, and did go on.

“ Well, papa; one day, when Lucy first began telling me, quite in earnest, that this Mr. Vidal—this Mr. Luke Squabs, was in love with me, I answered her rather lightly, I believe, upon which she became dreadfully agitated, and exclaimed that she knew my indifference for Mr. Vidal, could only be occasioned by—of course, papa, you must know it was the very greatest nonsense—by my preference—my love—I don’t know what she called it, for my cousin.”

“ And to cure her of her fears, you told her you loved Vidal?” cried the squire, his face suddenly becoming of a colour that seemed to threaten apoplexy.

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discover at that moment, for the squire had no sooner released her from his embrace, than he very nearly pushed her out of the room, and then shut the door upon her.

Mary returned to her own apartment a good deal agitated by the conversation, or at least by the latter part of it, yet too much elated, too much relieved by the un hoped for release from her matrimonial engagement, to be very long in recovering herself. And then she went into the drawing-room, where the breakfast was spread, because her father said it was less like a dungeon than the dining-room, and she walked to the window for the first time since her arrival in London, and looked out.

The sun was shining brightly, and every figure that passed along the street looked interesting. She began to think that she should greatly enjoy a drive, the first time, by the bye, that such an idea had ever occurred to her in London, and that it would be but kind if she called upon Lucy, and invited her to join her in it.

Meanwhile the squire, who felt as if the slightest delay in dispatching a note which he was writing might destroy all his hopes of earthly happiness for ever, sat at his little uncomfortable writing-table, and indited the following epistle:

“MY DEAR RICHARD HERBERT,

“I want you to dine with me to day, and to-morrow too, perhaps, however, we can settle that afterwards. But what presses most is that you

should come to me directly. I have something that I particularly wish to tell you. Indeed, I have more than one thing. We had a queer sort of adventure last night, which I think will make you laugh; but I shall not tell you any thing about it now, because I want you to come directly,

“Your affectionate cousin,

“JOHN JONAS CLEMENTSON.”

Having rang the bell as if the house had been on fire, and reiterated his order three times that the letter was to be sent directly, he finished his dressing, and went down stairs into the drawing-room.

There he found Mary pretty well recovered from the effects of the trying conversation she had held with him, and still engaged in looking out of the window.

“Well, papa,” she said, “do you know that after all, I don’t think this house is so very miserable as we have both of us been fancying it was? Do just look at these very pretty tables, and I am sure the carpet has been beautiful in its day.”

“No, Mary, now you speak of it fairly and without prejudice I do not think it is so very bad. We are rather spoiled you know, about rooms, at the park; but it is quite childish to expect that rooms in London should be as large as rooms in the country. But come along, my child; give me some coffee, I am half famished, and the rolls in London are excellent. I am glad to see that they have made a broil of the turkey, for I don’t know

what the deuce was the matter with me, but I was as cross as two sticks at dinner-time yesterday, and did not enjoy my dinner at all, though I do believe, in honest truth, that it was a very good one."

"I hope you will enjoy your dinner better to-day, papa. The sun shines so pleasantly this morning, and that makes such a difference. I should like to have the carriage ordered a little earlier, if you please. I quite long for a drive with no shopping to do. I have got no shopping to do now, thank Heaven! Have I, papa?"

"No, Mary. That plague is over as well as some others. It is really so pleasant to get rid of a trouble that is almost worth while to have had one on purpose to have the joy of saying to oneself that it is over. And where shall you drive, my dear?"

"Oh! to all the parks, one after the other, though I don't expect to find any of them so beautiful as our own; but I feel as if I should admire them for all that. And if you have no objection, papa, I think I should like to call on dear Lucy and ask her to go with me; I need not go in and see the old woman, you know."

"Dear Lucy!" shouted the squire, the apoplectic symptoms again appearing. "No, Mary, no; I would rather that you did not call on Lucy Dalton if you please, just at present. If I am not very much mistaken, your dear friend Lucy is of the two, rather a more vicious animal than her mother. But it is no good to talk about all that yet; I dare

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CHAPTER XV.

MARY rose up and then sat down again, and then looked at her father as if to receive instructions from him as to what she was to do next; but the old gentleman had fixed his eye upon Vidal, and appeared to see nothing else.

"I break in upon you, thus early, my dear sir," began my hero, "in order to satisfy my heart completely as to the state of your feelings towards me after the startling scene of last night. As to those of my dear affianced wife, I do not permit myself to entertain the slightest doubt. I know it to be perfectly impossible that a creature so pure in heart and so superior in mind, as my dear Mary, should suffer her affections or her promise to be shaken by her having discovered that my worthy father made his fortune in business, or that I have changed my name from what was peculiarly displeasing in sound to what I think very much the reverse, and when my dearest Mary shares it with me, I shall love it better still."

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Mr. Clementson
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a pair of your own footmen may be able to defend you better than you could defend yourself against the personal violence of which your ringing the bell proves you to be in dread. But you will find it more difficult, I suspect, to shield yourself from the legal process which I shall immediately institute against that young lady for breach of promise of marriage. I shall really, after all that has passed between us, be very sorry to bring her into court, because I well know how very offensive to a young female's delicacy are the cross-examinations which are sure to take place upon such occasions. Indeed, it will be with the very deepest reluctance that I shall do it ; nevertheless, it will be my duty, and therefore, Mr. Clementson, it will be done—if you, my sweet Mary do not exert your power over your father to prevent it ?”

“Open the door of the house for this person, Peter,” said the squire to the servant who now answered the bell, “and take great care, all of you, that he is never allowed to enter it again as long as we remain within it.”

“Order your fellow off, sir !” cried the enraged Vidal, really looking as if all the spirit of his father, multiplied by nine, were within him. “You will act very unwisely,” he added, “if you permit any thing like violence to take place. Your daughter's name is likely to be sufficiently compromised, and made sufficiently public, without that.”

“I have no inclination, Mr. Luke Squabs, to use

at all more violence than is necessary," returned the squire, resting a little on the word necessary, "but to that extent it must be used."

Let it not be supposed that dear little Mary Clementson sat by gazing on this scene. At the moment that her father, from the very intensity of his anger, like fire which grows paler the more vehemently it burns, at the moment when he began to address Vidal with so much more gentle and subdued voice than was usual with him, she flattered herself that the terrible scene would soon finish, and therefore remained stationary from a sort of feeling that she could not bear to forsake her father at a painful moment. But when Vidal addressed her as "his sweet Mary," she could stand it no longer, but fairly ran out of the room.

The first sensations which had followed the discovery of Vidal's fraud had in them something little short of rapture for Mary, for she at once felt that she had escaped the penalty her folly had so nearly brought upon her: but on returning to the quiet of her own room, after hearing Mr. Luke Squabs declare that it was his purpose to bring her into court for breach of promise of marriage, her feelings of misery and degradation completely overpowered her, and she fainted.

Marshall was fortunately in the little dressing-room close by, and hearing her fall, was by her side in a moment. The poor girl was approaching a sort of invalid arm-chair as she fell, and this luckily saved

her from injury, for her head dropped upon it ; yet her colourless face and total insensibility terrified her maid, for a moment, into the belief that she was dead. But that moment of real agony passed, nothing was omitted that could assist in restoring her. The maid raised her in her arms and laid her on the bed, and then bedewed her with *eau-de-Cologne* till she opened her eyes.

It will be readily believed that all, or very nearly all, which had passed in the house on the preceding night relative to Mr. Vidal and his aunt, had been commented upon at full length in the servants' hall, and Mrs. Marshall was at no loss to guess the cause of her young mistress's fainting fit.

Mrs. Marshall was by no means one of the highest order of waiting-maids, at least as far as moral qualities are concerned ; but, nevertheless, she was a woman, and the sight of her young lady's corpse, as she firmly believed it to be when she first rushed out of the dressing-room, had caused her a paroxysm of terror so painful, that when poor Mary opened her eyes, the words she addressed to her (though not without some feeling of kindness) were more like scolding than coaxing.

"How can you take on so, miss," she exclaimed, "about such a vile perjured villain as that? Wouldn't I be above caring for such a fellow, if I was you, miss !"

If the waiting-woman's feelings were so strong as to make her forget decorum, those of her young

of promise of

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with sufficient acuteness to be quite sure that Mr. Clementson would do more, and *give* more to avoid being made a party in a vulgar squabble, than to add a thousand a year to his estate.

It was, therefore, upon calculation that he turned towards the squire with the swagger of a bully, as he replied, "Go it then, old gentleman! I shall begin by sending this coffee-pot at your head."

Nothing could be more correct than my hero's reasoning. Mr. Clementson looked steadily in his face for a moment, and then replied, "Mr. Vidal, I suspect that in the intercourse between us, which my Lord Randal's indiscretion has led to, you have become better acquainted with my character than I have done with yours. You are quite right in supposing that I would rather endure your presence for a short time longer, than purchase my release from it by a brawl. You are perfectly at liberty, sir, to sit down. Peter, send Miss Clementson's maid to her, to inquire if I shall send her another cup of coffee."

At this moment the knock of a visiter was heard at the street-door, and the squire suddenly remembered that Lexington had promised to come to him; but though by no means insensible to the comfort of having a friend by him during the singular scene which Mr. Vidal seemed preparing, he was half frightened at the idea of what might ensue from the interference of a younger man than himself, and had almost determined upon leaving the tailor's son in possession of the drawing-room, when the door

opened, and not Lexington, but Richard Herbert entered it.

For a moment the squire felt doubtful whether he should make his young relative at once understand what was passing, or tell him to go down into the dining-room, and wait for him, as he was engaged on business. But there was blended with the youthful beauty of Herbert's features a look of latent pride, or what might be better expressed by Lady Macbeth's word "masterdom," which reassured him.

"He will not condescend to sully the queen's uniform by quarrelling with such a fellow," thought he; and advancing to meet him, he said, "I did not know I should have this person here when I invited you to come to me, Richard. But I dare say he will not embarrass us with his presence long. Come here, will you?"

And having led the greatly astonished young man into the back drawing-room, he related to him briefly, but clearly, the discovery of the preceding evening.

"What he hopes to gain by remaining here, after I have desired him to go, I know not," continued the squire, "unless it be a quarrel, which might, as he may suppose, enable him to conclude our lamentable acquaintance with the *éclat* of a duel. But I think we all know better than that, Richard."

"I should hope so, sir," replied the young man, showing at the same time that, notwithstanding the

want of expression often attributed to the Greek outline, there is no lip that curls so well, or speaks disdain so ably.

“Have you told him, sir,” he added, “that you wish him gone?”

“Yes; and for a moment I thought of making him descend the stairs in the quickest possible manner. But I recollected that my daughter was in the house, Richard, and preferred his remaining in the drawing-room.”

“But perhaps, sir, there might be a middle course,” replied Richard, very quietly.

“As how, my dear boy?” demanded the squire.

Young Herbert appeared not to hear the question. He was in fact in the act of leaving the room by the door leading to the stairs when it was asked, and the squire was well enough pleased to see him depart, though he was a little surprised at it too.

Having returned to the outer room, in order to see whether his pertinacious guest continued to keep possession of it, he found Mr. Vidal very tranquilly employed in looking over some music which lay upon the pianoforte, and which, being the especial property of Mary, it was particularly disagreeable to her father to see handled by Vidal.

He had almost made up his mind not to speak to him again; but this turning over Mary's musical sheets was more than he could stand, and once more he rang the bell.

It was now the butler who answered it. “Take

that music away, and tell Marshall to take care of it," said the squire.

The butler, who was a heavy-looking, elderly man, most strictly professional in his habits, approached the instrument, in order to obey this command, with the awkwardness of a gardener laying the cloth, or of a sailor grooming a horse. The books and loose sheets of music, which were scattered over the instrument, were soon collected; but Mr. Vidal held in his hand a little volume of favourite songs, copied by Mary's own hand, and the earliest of them having been written there when she was quite a child. It is probable that Mr. Vidal knew this book to be particularly precious to the squire; for when the butler, after casting a look of inquiry on his master, received a nod which made him approach with an extended hand to take it, my hero, having first pressed it to his lips, deliberately placed it upon his bosom, and buttoned his frock over it. He then returned to the fire-place, seated himself in an easy chair, and with all his accustomed elegance of manner, thus addressed his involuntary host:—

"I do assure you, my dear Mr. Clementson, that it is with extreme reluctance that I find myself obliged to enforce my rights upon your charming daughter's hand. I adore her, and have a very sincere regard for you; but your own common sense, my dear sir, may surely suffice to convince you that having gone so far towards uniting me to

your daughter and your estate, you cannot retract, as you seem disposed to do, without making me some atonement. Believe me, I should greatly prefer, for my sweet Mary's sake, that the question could be settled amicably between us. I should be delighted to prove, by marrying her and making her the happiest woman in existence, that the nineteenth century, which has for ever extinguished all the absurd distinctions of birth, has really made all men equal, and that civilisation advances with the progress of time. But if this happiness is denied me, if, indeed, I am cruelly and tyrannically obliged to resign my hopes of possessing your fair daughter, I must next turn my attention towards your estate. I shall propose to you what I consider as very fair terms; but if we differ on this point, I shall be most reluctantly obliged to demand justice from the laws of my country. But this reluctance, you should observe, my dear sir, will not be for my own sake, but for that of your sweet Mary. To me, the greater *éclat* and the greater publicity that can be thrown upon my endearing connexion with her, the more I shall feel my pride gratified. What man but might be proud of showing such endearing letters as those which I have received from her? But I am willing to forego this, Mr. Clementson; for the sake of sparing her angelic delicacy, I am willing to accept a yearly charge of 2000*l.* a year upon your estate, to be legally settled on me and my heirs for ever; or, if you prefer it, I will take the

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elegant Mr. Vidal did not approve. It was not in this manner that he wished to appear before the public, and the thoughts of a newspaper report of the adventure rushed across his brain like lightning.

"This is carrying an amorous frolic too far," he said, with admirable playfulness of manner; and at the same time he drew the little book from his bosom, impressed a kiss upon it, presented it to Mr. Clementson, and then added, "This is the only felony you have to charge against me, sir, is it not?"

Mr. Clementson snatched the book from his hand, and replied, "Leave the room, sir, and you will receive no further annoyance from me."

Vidal bowed, smiled, quietly took his hat, and left the room.

The policeman smiled too; for, besides the excellent jest of seeing so very elegant a gentleman on the eve of being given into custody for stealing a love-token, Mr. Clementson slipped a sovereign into his hand to repay his unnecessary trouble, and as no charge of bribery and corruption could be founded on his accepting it, he did so, leaving the squire and his young relation with a respectful bow. But before we relate what passed between them, it may be as well to follow my hero to the lodging of Miss Lucy Dalton, in order to see how he broke this important change in his prospects to her.

CHAPTER XVI.

HE found her, as usual, seated in her elegant miniature drawing-room, galloping through the last scenes of a French novel, while a delicate morsel of pale blue finery, which she was preparing for her beautiful head, was lying neglected on the table before her. There was certainly a very agreeable contrast to the feelings of Mr. Vidal between the drawing-room he had left, and that which he now entered. Lucy sprang to meet him with even more than her usual eagerness; for she had expected to see him at breakfast, and his not appearing had greatly disappointed her; for she had taken it into her head that she wanted to go to the opera, and she was impatient to consult him as to the best manner of doing so. So she threw her arms round his neck, and called him by every dulcet epithet that the vocabulary of love could supply. He returned her carresses very cordially, but before she could open the subject upon which she wished to consult him, she perceived that there was something wrong.

"You have bad news to tell me," she exclaimed. "Speak it out at once, Theodore. Do not keep me in suspense, I entreat you."

"Bad news!" he repeated, with an odd sort of smile. "Why, I am not quite sure that the news I bring is altogether bad. I have a great notion that what I shall lose one way I shall gain another."

"Lose?—what are you going to lose, my Theodore? Explain yourself, for mercy's sake!"

"You really must be patient, dearest, for my story is rather a long one."

And so it really was; but as the reader has had a truer version sufficiently at full length already, it will be enough to say, that whatever Lucy might think of it, she took exceedingly good care not to testify the slightest disapprobation of his having preferred one name to another, which was the only part of the last night's discovery scene on which he had dwelt.

As to his aunt's having been a waiting-maid, and his father a tailor, he saw no necessity whatever for mentioning either. He merely said that his real name was Squabs, Vidal being only that of a distant relation.

"But you never," he added, "saw any human being in such a rage as the old gentleman upon learning this, and, to make short of a long story, my Lucy, he told me with the utmost insolence that I should never marry his daughter. Now the truth is, my dear love, that I am tired to death of that

unmeaning little animal, and should welcome my release with rapture, were it not for the property. The loss of that is certainly a bore."

"A bore!" returned Lucy, turning pale. "O Theodore! what is to become of us?"

"There is still a very fine game upon the card my dear girl," he replied, composedly. "You do not imagine that I intend to give up my claim upon Miss Mary, and her houses and lands for nothing. I have told the squire that I shall bring the matter into court. My affianced Mary was present when I first mentioned this intention, and if you had seen the style in which she rushed out of the room at hearing it you would be very comfortably aware that I have still power enough in my hands to keep us afloat."

"But how can we be sure that if you bring it into court, there may not be something found out by the horrid lawyers relative to your attachment to me? The slightest suspicion of that sort, would be sufficient to make you lose your cause, and leave you with the costs to pay!" cried Lucy, with an aspect of dismay.

"Very true, my love," said my hero; "but I rather marvel that you should feel alarmed at anything that might happen IF the business came into court. I should have thought you must have known your old acquaintance, the squire, better than to believe he would permit such an exposure, let the avoiding it cost what it might. No, dearest, we will not go into court, that would not suit me."

at all. But I will tell you what would suit me, Lucy. It would suit me to get the half of the sum I have named to him, just the half of it, as a condition for settling the business quietly. I have asked for two thousand a-year, or for fifty thousand ready money. And I would willingly take half."

One of Lucy's loveliest smiles beamed upon her face as she listened to him; she did know the squire, and his Mary also, too well to doubt that they would both most gladly accede to any terms, rather than make themselves the subject of such newspaper paragraphs as must be the result of their pushing Vidal to extremities.

So the rest of the conversation was in a very gay tone; the notion of the squire's grimaces under the infliction, which my hero portrayed for Lucy's amusement with infinite humour, causing her to laugh till he was obliged to cease, for fear she should fall into hysterics.

Having thus pleasantly fooled away an hour or two with his beautiful friend, and leaving her at last, very resolutely determined in her own fond heart to become Mrs. Squabs as quickly as possible, my hero waited upon a legal acquaintance for the purpose of informing him of his situation, or as much of it, at least, as it was necessary for him to know, for the purpose of obtaining his services in the necessary business of giving the squire immediate notice that legal proceedings were about to be commenced against his daughter.

As it happened that Mr. Vidal's legal friend looked very much like a gentleman, Peter ushered him without scruple into the drawing-room, where Mr. Clementson and his daughter were sitting *tête-à-tête*. The first rush of happy feeling upon his escape from the hated marriage of Vidal with his daughter, being over, he, too, as well as Mary, began to droop under his degrading threats, and the possible exposure which hung over them. As to the penalty which had been named, the payment of it could not be thought of—not, indeed, on account of its enormous amount, to which they neither of them seemed to pay any attention, but because Mr. Lexington had pointed out the very obvious truth that the paying it would in no degree spare them the exposure they so greatly dreaded.

“If,” said he, “the business were brought into court, the strongest feeling of indignation against Vidal, would unquestionably be the consequence; and even if a verdict were given in his favour, which would be very doubtful, the damages would be considered by the public as a penalty willingly paid by a gentleman of honour, for the rashness with which an adventurer had been admitted to his society; whereas the payment of any sum, whether large or small, in the shape of a *bribe*, would soon be quite as publicly known, but must produce a very different impression.”

The truth of this reasoning was too obvious to be denied by either the poor squire himself, or his

equally suffering daughter; and the only hope that remained to cheer them, was that Vidal would himself shrink from bringing the affair before the public.

The first word uttered by the legal gentleman above-mentioned, chased this hope completely, and once more poor Mary took refuge in her room to conceal the misery that overwhelmed her.

She found Marshall there, who looked almost as anxious and as care-worn as herself. The whole business was now so well known among the household, that all affectation of secrecy was over, and Mary told her pale and very sympathising attendant who the visiter was from whose presence she had fled, and what was his terrible business.

Instead of offering her *eau-de-Cologne*, the waiting woman's eternal remedy, or attempting to say one single word of comfort, the gloomy *soubrette* only remained in the room long enough to hear what her mistress had to tell, and then rushed out of it almost as vehemently as Mary had rushed in.

And now, though not before, poor Mary Clementson was quite in a proper condition to fill the part of a heroine, for she really was most thoroughly miserable. In truth her condition was greatly worse than that of her father; for, notwithstanding all the painful feelings which weighed upon him, he had a hidden source of comfort in his heart, that was not shared by her. But yet it might have been, and if he had, she would still have been as well calculated to perform the part of a heroine, as

I have described her now, for she would, in that case, despite her broken promise of marriage, and all its threatened consequences have been as much above the ordinary lot of mortals in happiness, as she was now below it in suffering.

When Mr. Clementson and Richard Herbert had been left *tête-à-tête*, after the exit of my hero, and the dismissal of the policeman, the former, feeling a very strong, and very natural inclination to comfort himself after all he had gone through, led the latter, without any very great difficulty, to the subject they had discussed together during the miserable hour they had passed together, previous to Richard's departure from Dalbury Park.

"You would never guess, my dear boy, if you were to try for a twelvemonth," said Mr. Clementson, looking kindly at him, "what it was which led Mary to accept this Mr. Luke Squabs."

"Nay, sir," replied the young lieutenant, colouring to his ears, "I do not think it is much a matter of guessing. I dare say my cousin is not the first young lady who has been beguiled by the specious appearance, and manners, of that detestable personage, to take him for something the very reverse of what he really is. There is no need of guessing in order to arrive at the disagreeable conclusion that she was greatly attached to him."

"And if you have arrived at that conclusion, Mr. Richard Herbert," replied the squire, looking very angry, "you have made a great blunder."

“What other motive, sir,” said Richard, looking earnestly in the face of his companion, but stopping short in his question, either because he had not breath to finish it, or because he doubted his own right to do so.

“Very true, Richard, very true,” said the squire, recovering his good humour, “the matter is a very complicated one, I promise you, and by no means very easily understood; indeed, to tell the honest truth I have no right to say that I have myself received any very clear explanation of it. And yet, Richard, I think I understand it all perfectly. Your inamorata, Lucy, laid the train, ay, and set fire to it also, which has so very nearly destroyed the happiness of my girl for ever.”

Richard trembled from head to foot, though scarcely knowing why; but he spoke not a syllable, and the squire continued, “I think I told you, Richard, that Miss Lucy Dalton had confided to Mary the important secret of your attachment to her sweet self, and her hope that by my assistance your income might be made sufficient to marry her?”

“Infamous falsehood!” cried Richard, starting up. “Where is the girl? Tell me, sir, where I can find her! I will make her come and confess to you and to —; I will make her confess that the whole of this statement is a most infamous falsehood.”

“I know it, Richard, I know it,” replied the squire, “but sit down again, and listen to me patiently. This statement, false as it was, can hardly

be called the worst part of the business. What think you of her coming to me, and telling me, that as a matter of duty she wished to inform me of the mutual attachment of Mr. Vidal and my daughter. This disclosure, observe, was soon after I had been informed by Mary that you were devoted to Lucy. I knew your mother, Richard; she was my cousin, my first cousin, but I loved her with an affection stronger than any tie of relationship could create, and when I first heard of your attachment to my coachman's daughter, a multitude of painful feelings were aroused by it. But the worst of all was one, that you, who are not, it seems, very clever at guessing, would never, I dare say, have hit upon. I had taken it into my head, Richard, that of all men living I should have best liked you for a son-in-law myself."

"Oh, merciful Heaven!" cried the young man. "why, why did not you let me know it? Why did you not let me, at least, believe that it was possible?"

"Yes, all that is very true, my dear boy; a great deal of suffering would have been spared among us, if either I or you, either, Richard, had been a little more sincere."

"But how could I be sincere?" said Richard, almost sternly. "What would have been the unavoidable inference, if I, a needy lieutenant, had returned your generous and confiding hospitality by endeavouring to steal the affections of your heiress?"

Do not accuse me of insincerity, Mr. Clementson, call my conduct by any other name but that."

"Then I must call it honourable and delicate, I suppose," returned the squire, extending his hand to him kindly; "and yet, Richard, that will be a bad moral lesson, too, for it will make me hate both, I am afraid, to my dying day.

"But to return to that little wretch, Lucy, who it is evident has acted the part of a malignant spirit through the whole; I will not deny, Richard, that like an old fool as I was, I heard this statement of the mutual attachment between my Mary and the much admired Vidal with pleasure. I had been cut to the quick by finding that you had overlooked my darling, and fallen in love with her humble companion, and as the only object in life that I cared about was Mary's happiness, with the proviso, mind you, Richard, that she was never to be parted from me, I was much more glad than sorry, to hear that this Theodore Vidal, as he called himself, though moving in the very highest circles, was not greatly encumbered with either lands or houses, so that I felt delightfully certain of retaining them near me. But now comes the blackest villany of all. I have learnt this very day from my poor Mary, that when the lying favourite pleaded the cause of Vidal to her, and pretended to seek a reason for the indifference with which she heard of his love, she suddenly fell into a passion of tears, declaring that it was only to be accounted for by

supposing that an unrequited passion for you, Richard, was the cause of it, and that as your love was pledged to her, nothing but misery could be the consequence. Can you wonder, Herbert, that my poor child was caught in the snare? Can you wonder that rather than be suspected of volunteering her love to one who cared not for her, she should in a fatal moment consent to receive the addresses of another? She was wrong, poor girl! Oh! she was very wrong, I know it, I know it. I only ask if you can much wonder at it?"

"That she should shrink from such an imputation, sir," replied Richard, in a voice of the deepest melancholy, "can surprise no one. Nor must you blame her, Mr. Clementson, if her feelings towards an almost destitute orphan, are less—less out of the common way than your own."

"Oh no, Richard! As far as I can make out, she is not very greatly to be blamed—only a little, like the rest of us—for you, my fine fellow, had no great business, as far as I can see, to make so much make-believe love to Miss Lucy. Nor had I any great business to go and ask Mr. Vidal if he would be so obliging as to accept my Mary and her seven or eight thousand a year. So we must all mutually forget and forgive all round."

"I have nothing to forgive, sir," said Richard, looking the very picture of woe. "And as to forgetting! The failing to do that, can injure no one but myself."

“ But I forgot to tell you, Herbert, that I asked Mary whether Miss Lucy had any cause for the suspicion which threw her into such an agony. The suspicion about her liking you, I mean.” Young Herbert started to his feet. He was as pale as death, and really as much unable to utter a word as if he had been struck dumb.

“ Mr. Lexington !” said Peter, throwing open the drawing-room door for the gentleman he named to pass through it.

Arthur made many apologies for coming at so much later an hour than he had promised. He had been detained by another visit from Mrs. Martha Squabs, who, though a faithful servant, and an excellent person in her way, thought it best not to lose sight of the heir whose interests she had so effectually served, till she had learnt something a little definitive as to his intentions in her favour. She had entered upon the subject with him directly, like a sensible woman as she was, which saved a great deal of time, and left Lexington at liberty to fulfil his engagement within an hour or so of the time he had named, and sent her off perfectly satisfied in quest of her beloved nephew, with the agreeable intelligence that she had now another thousand pounds, in addition to all her savings, wherewith to reward the dutiful affection which she persisted in believing she was to receive from him.

The most important result of Arthur's visit to

Mr. Clementson, has been already stated; and in pursuance of his advice, Mr. Vidal's legal friend was dismissed, with an assurance that whenever his principal thought proper to commence proceedings, Mr. Clementson would be ready to meet them.

It would be difficult to imagine an individual less at his ease than poor Richard, while this advice of Lexington's was given, canvassed, and finally acceded to.

The agony of suspense in which he had been left by Arthur's entrance at the very moment, when Mr. Clementson seemed on the point of uttering what appeared to him to be of at least equal importance with a sentence of life or death, and the having to listen to the horrible proposition of sending Mary into a public court of law! To have her name bandied from mouth to mouth, with the certainty of her being *found guilty* of having promised to marry Theodore Vidal, *alias* Luke Squabs!—and finally to hear his cousin, the squire, formally and solemnly acquiesce in this proposal, was more than he could bear, and while the squire and Arthur were mutually confessing to each other that there was nothing else to be done, he suddenly got up and left the room.

To leave the house, however, he felt to be impossible, till he should have heard all that Mary's father was going to say when interrupted by Mr. Lexington; and, after a moment's consideration as to what he was to do with himself, he took refuge in the dining-room.

Any body who by any accident has ever been turned, during the morning, into a London dining-room, must be aware that not the thickest covert of the Black Forest can give a greater feeling of profound loneliness than does that then dismal, dark, and deserted region.

Its influence fell powerfully on the spirit of Richard Herbert, and, joined to the racking uncertainty of his own situation with respect to Mary, together with the sickening anxiety he felt on her account relative to the tremendous measure which had been decided on up-stairs, threw him into a state of miserable despondency, such as he had never felt before.

People, when they are in low spirits, are generally more disposed to blame themselves than at any other time, and before Herbert had, in quarter-deck fashion, paced up and down the room half-a-dozen times, he began to accuse himself of being the cause of all the misery from which both he and Mary were suffering.

Notwithstanding his modesty (and brave young sailors, strange as it may seem, not unfrequently have a good deal of that quality), but, notwithstanding his modesty, there were some few shadowy and indistinct little recollections at the very bottom of Richard's heart, which made him almost gasp, as they suggested the possibility that Mary's answer to her father's question might not have been absolutely fatal to every possible chance of future happiness for him.

Would the kind-hearted squire have alluded to it so lightly if it had?

And if it had *not*, oh, what a monster of ingratitude had he shown himself! And, then, how worthless appeared all the magnanimous feelings of proud independence which had hitherto supported him!

The possibility, the mere shadow of a possibility, that Mary had showed the generous feeling of her father towards him, almost drove him wild between agony and rapture, and the poor young man really looked and felt as if he were about to lose his reason.

At last, a gleam of light, very bright, but very like one of Jove's thunderbolts, that may scorch as well as shed a glorious radiance, seemed suddenly to flash across his mind.

"No! by Heaven!" he exclaimed, *almost* aloud, "I will live no longer like the poor cat in the fable?"

He had a set of little ivory tablets in his pocket, with a pencil attached to them. He detached one of the leaves, and wrote upon it in French these words:—"Forgive me, dear cousin, for taking this strange liberty, but circumstances compel me to it. I implore you to see me in the dining-room for five minutes. Your father and Mr. Lexington are engaged with business in the drawing-room.—R. H."

Having written this desperately bold mandate, Richard rang the bell, and, having wrapt the bit of

ivory in paper, he put it into the hand of the servant who answered it, and requested very earnestly that it might be immediately given to Miss Clementson.

Almost as soon as it was possible that the missive could have reached her fair hand, and that her fairy feet could have obeyed the summons it conveyed, Mary Clementson stood in the presence of her trembling lover.

The first word that was exchanged between them was pronounced by her.

“Good Heaven, cousin Richard!” she exclaimed, “what is it has happened to you? Are you ill? Tell me, are you ill? You are as pale as death!”

Mary looked really frightened, upon which Richard immediately felt that he must summon sufficient courage and sufficient calmness to make her comprehend at once the nature of his case. And this he did, with all the eloquence of truth, all the energy of his ardent character, and all the fervour of youthful and devoted affection.

Poor Mary had gone through a great deal lately, and had really suffered enough to shake the nerves of a young girl so totally unused to sorrow as she had been before this terrible business of being “brought out” had plunged her into all sorts of mental commotions and sufferings; so she really must be excused for the total want of dignity and presence of mind which she manifested upon this occasion.

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Not if she had been the very ugliest of dairy-maids, could she have felt more unspeakably grateful, or more exquisitely happy than she did, as now, at last, he was pleased to let her know that he thought he liked her best.

And how did she signify her approbation of this tardy declaration? Did she turn away her head, and beg to have time allowed her to examine the state of her heart?

No.

I am positively almost ashamed to write it, but she actually stretched out both her hands to him, without speaking a word; and upon his making the very least effort imaginable to draw her towards him, she yielded to it, without even the affectation of resistance, and was, of course, immediately enclosed in his arms.

What else could she expect?

As to following them through the dialogue which ensued, I really cannot attempt it; for truly it was such a disjointed medley of rapture and misery, of agonies past and felicities to come; of mutual self-accusations, explanations, confessions, and Heaven knows what beside, that the most pellucid style of narration ever hit upon could not avoid making a jumble of it; and it would prove

utterly unintelligible, when deprived of the by-play of tears, caresses, and looks, by which it was rendered so particularly the contrary to those engaged in it.

Very luckily for the lovers in the dining-room, the two gentlemen over their heads had still a great deal to say to each other.

The poor squire, more than once after he had given his consent to the measures proposed by Mr. Lexington, came back again to his starting point, wishing to impress most strongly on the mind of his friend, that money was no object with him, nor with Mary either, provided it could be expended in any way that might save them from the degradation of the threatened exposure.

To all which the patient, kind, but reasonable Lexington reiterated all the reasons he had before given, to prove that the offer of money to Vidal would be indisputably more degrading than any legal investigation of the circumstances could be; and when obliged to yield the point, finally, his despair, as he contemplated the situation of Mary, alone in London under such circumstances, without a female friend to speak to, made him cry like a child.

But suddenly something like a gleam of satisfaction appeared on his countenance, as, removing his hand from his forehead, he looked up at Arthur, and said: "Do you think, Lexington, that if I wrote myself to Clara Maynard, stating the case exactly as it stands, and imploring her to take her

old Hannah, and come to my poor Mary by the railroad, do you think she could refuse?"

"I do not think she *would* refuse, my dear Mr. Clementson," said Arthur, a ray of *not* unaccountable pleasure dancing in his eyes as he spoke.

"Then, by Jove! Lexington, I will write this very moment. But we won't tell poor Mary of it, for fear we should be disappointed."

"You will not be disappointed," said Arthur, smiling. "But, talking of secrets, I must beg you to keep one for me. Do not mention the death of my poor aunt, or her will. I would rather tell her of it *viva voce*."

The letter was soon written, and Arthur himself set off to put it in the post. And when he was gone the poor squire fell into such a fit of melancholy musing upon the miserable manner in which he had managed the bringing out of his heiress, that there was scarcely a beggar in the street who might not have studied the wo-begone expression of his features as a model.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE threatened trial was indeed a melancholy business, and not even the newly-found happiness of the young lovers in the dining-room was proof against the sharp pang with which it was remembered.

"Surely, Mary, Mr. Lexington is wrong," said Richard—"surely any thing would be better than going into court with it. There goes Lexington!" he added, running to the window, as Arthur closed the house-door behind him.

"Let us go to your dear father, Mary; let us tell him that the cruel barrier of ice that was built up between us is thrown down; and then let us implore him to listen to us about this dreadful business. If *you* ask him to give it up, I do not think it is in his nature to refuse you."

Before Richard had finished speaking, they were already half way up the stairs; and if there had been any sight in the world capable of cheering the half-broken heart of the poor squire, it was that of Mary


and Richard entering hand in hand, and kneeling down together at his feet to ask his blessing.

What they said he knew not; neither he nor they were sufficiently composed to pay particular attention to words, but their story was easily told in pantomime; and as the old gentleman threw his arms around them both, he felt for a moment as if nothing could ever make him very unhappy again. Yet it was his own Mary herself whose voice aroused him from this sweet oblivion; and then he had the grievous task to perform of telling her that he *must not* comply with her wishes.

But when, upon Richard adding his pleadings to hers, the squire repeated to them both the painfully cogent arguments which had convinced himself, he had at least the melancholy satisfaction of perceiving that they also found them irresistible.

The word BRIBE, as Lexington had used it, was quite effectual, and they all seemed to feel that nothing could avert the hateful measure that had been decided on. The hot and cold fits of an ague perhaps may furnish the best illustration in describing the style of conversation which then ensued between the trio. One moment they all seemed almost too happy to be reasonable, and the next quite too miserable to endure the sound of their own voices.

It was during one of these silent intervals that the drawing-room door was thrown open, and Marshall entered, holding an open letter in her hand, and evidently in a state of great excitement. She



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wrong in the way you got it, but you have been most decidedly right in the use you have now made of it," said the squire. "Go now," he added, "we will talk it all over by and by." And then he seized upon pen, ink, and paper.

Of the paper he pushed one sheet towards Richard, and took another himself.

"Copy that precious document, my dear boy, fairly and quickly," said he, "Mary! if you interrupt him, I will send you to bed." And while Richard obeyed him with a rapid pen, he indited the following epistle himself.

"Mr. Clementson presents his compliments to Mr. Luke Squabs, and incloses to him the copy of a letter which has just come into his possession. The original will be intrusted to the hands of his lawyer, and will form the only ground of defence for Miss Clementson's breach of promise."

* * * * *

And now my story is done. Its moral, I flatter myself, is obvious. ATTRACTIVE MEN SHOULD NEVER BE RECEIVED UPON TRUST.

* * * * *

Perhaps some of my friends may like to know that Clara Maynard arrived in London in time to discover that her presence could very perceptibly increase happiness, but that it was not wanted at that particular moment to assuage grief; for a happier party than she found in Mr. Clementson's

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assembled together in the drawing-room after dinner, and a jeweller gentleman entered it, attended by a carrier of caskets, it was perceived that he was doubly loaded. The clerk-like looking personage first relieved his attendant of one very respectably weighty box, and delivered it into the hands of Mr. Clementson; and then of the other, which was by no means contemptibly light, which in like manner he deposited in those of Mr. Lexington.

Both gentlemen were evidently well, and properly prepared for this adventure, for they each immediately deposited in their turn a portion of the contents of their respective pocket-books in his hands, for the which, by way of a rejoinder, they received from the gentleman clerk a bit of stamped paper that appeared to be perfectly satisfactory; and then, after two distinct bows, respectfully given, and civilly returned, the clerk and his attendant disappeared, the caskets were unpacked by their respective owners, and their elegant contents displayed before the two fair creatures for whose use they were intended.

Neither of them contained diamonds, excepting in the shape of clasps, the long descended family possessions of the squire in that line having been suffered to remain in the strong room at the park; the new setting them having appeared a matter of indifference both to father and daughter, at the time of their leaving it.



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Mr. Clementson, which has been given above, he immediately waited upon the beautiful Lucy, and placed both it and its enclosure in her hands, in a style that seemed to imply some displeasure at her carelessness.

Lucy Dalton's temper was of the kind which does not stand well under reproach, and for a moment she gave way to rather a violent burst of anger. But having relieved herself in this manner for a few minutes, she "changed her hand," and throwing herself upon the bosom of her lover, exclaimed, "What a fool am I, Vidal, to resent a hasty and unmeaning word! You cannot mean seriously to reproach me with being unmindful of your interest, for you know I am incapable of it! Let us think no more, my Theodore, of Mary Clementson's worthless promise; let me rather, dearest, recall your attention to your own. As long as I saw any reason to hope that you might obtain the hand of my wealthy friend, I carefully abstained from urging any claim upon you that might interfere with it. But, now that there is no longer any hope of this, and that, moreover, my reputation is at the mercy of the Clementsons, in consequence of their having surreptitiously obtained possession of this letter, it becomes my duty, and yours too, dearest, to remember that we are, in fact, indissolubly united by the written promise you have given me. And now, my Theodore, the sooner this promise is redeemed the better."



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That she sought him with all the vehement anxiety of despairing love, cannot be doubted; but all the intelligence she could ever gain concerning him was, that he was seen that same night at the Bricklayers' Arms, stepping into the mail train for Dover.

As soon as the coachman's beautiful daughter felt convinced that he was gone, she mentioned the circumstance rather abruptly to her venerable mother, whereupon a fatal fit of apoplexy ensued, which, under the circumstances, perhaps, was the best thing that could have happened to her.

As to Lucy herself I have for the gratification and satisfaction of my readers taken great pains to discover what became of her, but have been quite unable to succeed. All I could learn with certainty was, that she left her lodgings without paying for them, and that her mother was buried by the parish.

Lord Randal, with all his good nature, could not stand the quizzing he got about his accomplished friend Mr. Luke Squabs, and actually passed a whole year at his Irish castle before he ventured to return to the shelter of his favourite Oaks.

Sir William and Lady Sarah Monkton suddenly took an unconquerable aversion to "The Vine," and having announced their intention of selling it, Arthur Lexington became the purchaser, and the transaction was completed so promptly that Lady

Sarah had the gratification of appearing at a magnificent fancy ball at Rome within two months of her receiving the intelligence that the elegant, but too susceptible Theodore Vidal was known among his own people by no other name than Luke Squabs.

THE END.



